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JOHN SENESCHAL'S MARGARET

AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

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BY

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PROLOGUE

THE TWO JOHNS

I

JOHN SENESCHAL and John Tempest became comrades only after a long companionship.

They had met first on the banks of the Tigris, the bitter river; they had marched the sandy waste, navigated the treacherous tide; shared brilliant unrecognized triumphs between Kut el Amara and the victory and doom of Ctesiphon; shared the long misery of Kut and the appalling traject across Asia Minor, from prison to prison; the spoil of the unspeakable Turk. All this they had gone through together; and there had been, besides, a singular similarity between them, as to appearance and circumstances. Both were officers in native Indian regiments; both tall and active, dark-faced, swift in thought, temper and action; both twenty-eight years of age, and practically homeless. John Seneschal had some grudge in his heart against his own which kept him from returning to them, even when leave permitted, and John Tempest had no home to go to; no kith or kin in all the world nearer than an indifferent uncle and cousins in Manchester who scarcely cared to know whether he lived or died.

They were but two out of some thousand English youths in the great land of India who spend their springtime energies, give the best of their years and manhood to hard service, with tireless devotion. They were part of a great machine, and yet part of the soul of the Empire. They lived among strangers and brought their home ways to a strange life. They put up patiently with a vast amount of drilling and nagging from those over them, and were as gods to those under them—prophets, masters, mothers, all in one, to the dusky alien who may bear a tiger's heart, or a snake's, within his brown breast.

John Tempest had been in the first batch flung from India upon that mad initial venture up the Tigris; and John Seneschal had joined the forces with his regiment shortly before the first taking of Kut el Amara—too brilliant dawn of a fatal day! But it was only when they found themselves—through the callous ineptitude of Turkish officialdom cast with three other officers into a wretched mud-built hamlet in Anatolia, that the friendship between the two Johns began.

It was there they became comrades.

Now, of all the ties which bind human beings together, there is none so purely beautiful as true comradeship. It is, in the first place, devoid of self-interest; most often based, indeed, on some unselfish desire to serve and benefit the other—"*There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*"—"*He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom rejoiceth greatly.*" The tradition of it has come, consecrated through the ages. It is free from the confusing clamors of passion. Here is not the cry of the blood, or parental instinct, or the yearning of man to woman, but deliberate choice of soul for soul,

temper for temper, taste for taste. What a man shares best with his comrade is the wild life; chase, adventure, work, danger or death. What the mood of a man holds for his comrade is better than the deepest, tenderest love-emotion; it is that part of him which is most individual, most independent and unshackled, the free spirit of him. And when the time comes a man will give his life for his comrade with a spring of the heart that is almost joy.

There were five of them, in the mud room, in the mud village, set in a landscape that seemed all mud—for it rained without ceasing. In the prison den where they were caged together—so small it was, so unaired, so filthy and degraded that no man in England would have kenneled a hound in such a place—the mud was, as the "Buffer" had it, active. It was not merely passive, as outside on that forlorn stretch which they could see from their minute window, but active; with a smell of its own, aye and a life of its own; spiders and bats, and beetles and rats; crawling things and running; vileness engendered out of vileness!

The five self-respecting gentlemen, with English blood in their veins, did their best, from the beginning to the end of their dreadful incarceration in that God forgotten hole, to keep themselves and it, clean. It was a losing battle; but they went at it indomitably, and would not own themselves defeated. Even so it was with the thousands of other indomitable soldiers of the Empire scattered in obscene prisons on the inhuman waste. Many died at their task; but if they did not die clean it was through no fault of theirs.

These five had the spirit that will not own defeat. Save for the two whose course had such a singular simil-

itude, they were an odd set; shaken, as it were, haphazard out of the dice box of fate. The Buffer was a "dug-out." He had been through the Boer war, had come from his hunting and shooting, his pleasant country existence in far Ireland to take any post in which he could serve the flag. An old soldier and a sportsman, every inch of him, he steadied the young ones with his imperturbable courage, his quaint humor, and his occasional well-placed fits of temper. Hear a fellow fling a properly blasting curse in the right direction, when your own cup seems suddenly too full to hold; it will brace you, enable you to laugh, instead of casting your manhood away! If you lost your grip of yourself out there, you were done for, all knew that. Therefore was the Buffer precious; his very company controlled; a single glance of his blue eyes brought you back to your bearings. Yet those eyes looked out of his tanned, lined face with a strange expression sometimes—an expression the meaning of which John Tempest knew very well and kept to himself. The Buffer, staring in front of him, was contemplating an inevitable doom; but beyond the grim of death he saw Eternity. He had never said it to them: "I'll not get out of this, boys." But that was what it meant, Tempest knew. He had seen that look on many another good man's face.

Besides the Buffer, they had all their nicknames for each other. There was "Rumty," the Australian airman; and "Old Codger," who, absurdly, was a fair, downy subaltern of Engineers, the youngest of the party. He it was who had found a fitting sobriquet, at last, for the two Indian officers. It had kept them amused, day after day, to discuss this knotty point; so much like children

will men deliberately make themselves when they must distract their minds or go mad!

"My mother—great old lady she was," said the Buffer. "Lord, she kept a fine state—two footmen, no less, and powder and silk stockings on 'em, of a dinner-party night! Well, it chanced she had a pair of 'em once. And both were Chawles. The old butler was awfully taken to. 'I won't answer for the consequences, my lady. Something'll have to be done.' 'Why,' says my mother, 'don't be a fool, Potler'—good name for a butler, what?—'don't be a fool, Potler. Call 'em Thomas and James.' You needn't laugh, boys. The old lady knew what she was about. It was not stupidity, it was genius. There could be no silks, you see, if both had to surrender the beautiful name of Chawles.

"Let's call our two pukka warriors here Bill and Bob," cried Rumty, who had got his own name, ironically enough, from an old copy of Dickens which had been passed from hand to hand in their last prison camp. Flight Commander Able Lowrie's excessive leanness, his angles in fact, being compared with Mr. Wilfer's inviting curves.

But it was Old Codger who named the two Johns: Seneschal "Brown John," and Tempest "Black Jack"—for he declared the latter's beauty to be a shade more of the "brunette kind."

There was yet another point of distinction between them, which was beginning to fret one of them to the core, for already the comrade warmth was aglow. John Seneschal had taken a chill before—owing to improperly inscribed railway passes—they had been dragged out of the train like misdirected luggage at this infinitely negligible station belonging to the mud village in the Anatolian

waste. And John Seneschal coughed. The Buffer, who had a little medicine case, gave him quinine, for he was sure the boy had fever. They could not get him to lie down much, for there is not any inducement to lie down on straw and rags, unless you've tired yourself out enough to sleep. You keep on your legs as long as you can, pacing, wild-beast fashion, the narrow confines of your cage; doing your best not to jostle the other fellow who is at it, too.

They took it in turns. They had to keep themselves fit; and they made a calculation, quite mathematical in its carefulness, for dividing the hours of exercise on a twelve-foot space fairly between five. They had to keep fit for a purpose—the purpose which, far more than rice and sour milk and putrid sausage, maintained life in them. They meant to escape. None of them could afford to be ill—that was clear. So John Seneschal swallowed the quinine; and whether, shuddering in the cold fit or burning in the hot—"a darned sight hotter than their stove," as Rumty vowed—denied furiously that there was anything the matter with him, save a common or garden cold.

He even went out into the ceaseless drizzle when each prisoner took his turn to accompany the Buffer on his perfectly futile daily visit to the commandant, to be invariably met with the same sickening smile and Oriental shrug, palms extended: "No reply from headquarters." For there was a commandant to these mud hovels, who (according to his asseverations) daily sent a telegram to represent to the authorities the absurd fate of five British officers stranded by mistake on the railway line. On their way back they were usually permitted to stop at a bazaar—all under the strict surveillance of their two filthy

Turkish guards—and pick out from between the flies something to supplement the everlasting rice.

John Seneschal—or Brown John—he knew himself equally well by that name now—had a terrible craving for air. Their code being that no one of them should profit at the expense of another, he took care not to mention it; but give up his turn, hanged if he would! After some ten days' illness, the shuddering cold fits and the reacting hot fits merged into a kind of general level of bearable discomfort. And except that he found his meals "a bit of an offense," that, under the deep ingrain of his bronze, there grew to be a settled patch of color on each cheek, and that he was thinner—but, then, they all were that, of course!—he seemed much the same as before to most of them. Only he still coughed, and Tempest had a heavier heart day by day, and slept light of nights, when the others snored, listening.

It was on a night when only the two Johns were awake—the one tossing and coughing, the other, every nerve on the stretch with the miserable sense of his own impotence—that, at last, John Tempest felt he could stand it no longer.

He jumped up from his apology for a bed and crawled over to the couch of piled-up planks, straw and overcoats, which they had contrived for Seneschal under the window. The sick man was trying to smother the racking cough; to smother, too, the groan of pain it drew from him.

"I say, old chap, let me boil you a drink. I'll blow that blasted little furnace up in a jiffy."

"Woke you, Black Jack, did I?—Too bad!"

"Oh, I was not asleep. Here, lean against me. See if you can't get your breath better that way. There's actually a bit of a fresh wind coming in."

"Tempest——"

"Well, Brown John, what is it?"

"Tempest, I—I, oh, my God, I can't struggle any more. I'll never see it all again."

"Hold up, chappie. Poor old chappie! I say, though, I must cover you up a bit. Do you sweat every night like this? You're drenched."

"I'll never see Thornbarrow again."

Thornbarrow! It was the first time that Tempest had heard the name. And it was as he supported his comrade, and listened, rent with compassion, that the smoldering affection between them blazed to a noble fire.

The paroxysm of coughing had subsided, and Seneschal let his head lie on Tempest's shoulder as if it found some kind of rest there.

"I know you're all putting off the start because of me. See here, Black Jack, it's no manner of use. I've jolly well got to face it. It's got to get me, this grave in the mud, or the sand, or whatever it is! Don't you fellows hang back any more. You'll miss your chance. Leave me behind."

Tempest laughed, as the Englishman laughs when the whole soul of him is waste with inner tears.

"Leave you! Likely, isn't it? Now you just stop flapping your old fins about, and listen to me. We'll set off on this blessed stunt as soon as may be; and I'll stand by you—why, you'll be another man once we've got trekking. It's this hell business here that's doing for you."

"I'd only be a drag. I'd spoil it all. I say, Black Jack, you're the best chap in the world, but I'd only drop on the way."

"Well, and if you did, what of it? You'd drop free."

They were still clasped like brothers, Tempest's strong

lean arms flung round the other's emaciated body. He had had no idea the poor fellow was so thin till he had caught hold of him. Then Seneschal said, in a different voice, a voice into which life and hope had crept back:

"All right, old nut, I'll lay down now, as Rumty says. That's bucked me up a bit—what you said."

"Which part of it?"

"That if I did drop on the way, I'd drop free."

"You won't drop, though—you'll get home. Back to that place—what did you call it?"

"Thornbarrow."

Brown John, alias Seneschal, had a strange accent in pronouncing the name of his home. It rang to the ear of the other, who was a homeless man, as a chord of music to which he had not himself the key.

"Tell me about it," said Black Jack, alias Tempest—"dashed if I can think of going back to that menagerie which is wrote sarcastic 'bed.' Would it make you cough, if I lit a cigarette?"

"Of course not."

Seneschal would have one himself. They still had tobacco. If they had not had tobacco, they would all just as soon have chucked the whole devilish show.

So the long lyric of Thornbarrow began.

The two sat in a harmony as profound as it was unacknowledged, and the hoarse voice of John Seneschal went on and on, while the long dreary night waned into the long dreary day, and the rain pattered outside over the Anatolian plain.

Thornbarrow, the tall gray house in the rolling Chase with its paneled, echoing rooms and its great banqueting hall, where the sunshine struck in nearly always, for the

mullioned windows faced each other. There were suits of armor and odd old things in that hall. And it was supposed to be rather a wonderful place, for people came to see it; architects and that—the paneling, the minstrels' gallery and the old, old armoried panes. And there was always a smell as of the woods in it, from the beeswax and turpentine—the maids were forever on their knees of a morning, polishing and polishing. And, oh, there never was any place that smelt so clean as Thornbarrow! It was full of fresh air, too, and the scent of roses and potpourri. And yet it felt so old. All those ancient fellows that looked down from their big tarnished frames—fading away into the darkness, some of them from sheer age—seemed to be, somehow, all about still.

"And then, if you looked at Edward and Stephen, my brothers, poor chaps! Who would have thought it?—the Boches got them both, the same day. I can't realize it. It's mortal hard on the old man—and if I go, too . . . Never mind, what was I saying?—If you looked at Ned and Steve, and at my father, too, you saw that all those painted old Seneschals were alive still and jolly well alive, too—the same faces."

For the Seneschals, Brown John went on to state with a certain pride, had been at Thornbarrow since the Lord knew when, and they had all been fair—except him. But he had got his dark mug honestly, too: there among the blond cavaliers and courtiers, hung the noted Vandyck—the foreign ancestress, she whom the Seneschal who had gone with Charles and Buckingham on their barren royal quest for a wife, had brought back from Spain. She had made no impression on the race, till he was born. But there it was, out at last in him, the Spanish blood!

"Here in my veins, old chap. It's made me a bit too

hot for comfort, all my life, I'm afraid. They found me a bit too hot at home. There, never mind that! I'll tell you some time. I don't want to think of it now. I'll think of Thornbarrow—I say, old man, you know what an English country place means to a boy."

But Black Jack only knew vaguely what life in a little country parsonage on the outskirts of Cambridge could teach him, and occasional visits to a Manchester suburb—a huge, pretentious red-brick house, with a brand-new garden, and a lodge that you could see from the drawing-room window, guarding an asphalt drive—that was as much as he knew of English country life. And precious glad he had been to leave it and get away to the blazing romance of India.

"Oh, Black Jack, you've missed a lot, you know! But then, there never has been any place like Thornbarrow. All down land. Miles and miles of it. It used to be the King's hunting ground, centuries back. Why, I believe it's as wild now, almost, as in the days of King John! But it links back to times, long before that. Prehistoric times. 'Pon honor, I'm not pulling your leg. There are the huge Barrows where the chieftains, Iberians, or—nobody quite knows what—lie buried in underground tombs. They buried them with their horses and their slaves, I believe, so that they might enter in state into the unknown realm. Splendid old fellows they must have been, for you find them lying as they fought and fell opposite each other; the great Barrow for the great leader, and the small ones, spreading out all round him for their valiant men. Face to the foe, you bet, they fell. Well, there's nothing left of all that fighting now. Nothing but an old, old peace—oh, the peace of Thornbarrow! the dreaminess, the cool! We've got a bit of

forest, oak forest. It looks as if it had seen the Druids. . . . And there's the mere, fed by the jolliest little stream you ever saw. To see it in the dawn, with the trees reflected in it, and the yellow light coming level, catching every rush and every blade of grass. . . . I used to get up in the dawn, and go out with Roger, that was the head keeper . . . and Hod—my own retriever, the jolliest beast . . ."

The dawn was coming over the soaked stretches without; a gray dawn stealthy and callous and cruel as the Turk himself. But the English lad lay back on the folded overcoat that served him as pillow, with closed eyes and a smile on his lips. The serene spell of Thornbarrow was enfolding him once more.

It fell upon John Tempest, too. He had listened with the eagerness of a child.

And as days and nights went by, John Seneschal, as it were, took John Tempest by the hand and led him through every room of the old house, describing so vividly and minutely that it seemed as if in truth they were there together. They strolled out into the Chase; they sat side by side on the Barrows. John Tempest looked with John Seneschal's eyes on the wild rolling Downs, and saw, on the one side Hod and Hambledon—the strange hills with their green crowns of prehistoric camp—and on the other the plum purple of the Wiltshire heights. They went the round of the woods at night with old Roger and young Hod, and had an encounter with poachers; a great deal more thrilling, this, than any stunt with the Turks. They got up with the dawn to watch for wild duck by the pool; and forgot all about killing in the wonderful radi-

ance, the magic, the stillness, the peace and beauty of it all.

Tempest found that the more he encouraged his friend to talk of home and home-going, the quieter Seneschal's mind became; that, with the cessation of the inner ravages of fretting, those of the physical disease fell also into abeyance.

John Seneschal began to mend; he slept and ate more, and coughed less. Hope looked out from his dark eyes, and confidence rang in his voice. The prospect of escape was renewal of life to him.

They had many plans to make, the five of them; the wet spell having passed away, such preparations as could be made were pushed forward with feverish activity; accumulation of food for the journey; contriving of knapsacks and mending of footgear; exercises of endurance—very necessary experiments as to the weight which could be borne with safety.

It was quietly settled that the two Johns should go practically unburdened; or, rather, Black Jack had secretly announced his intention of bearing the burden of Brown John.

"You see how it is," he explained to the others. "It's his one chance for life. I've promised him I'll get him home. If it's only to die there, I'll get him back to his Thornbarrow."

They all said, "Right-o, Black Jack," and the Buffer would add: "Keep your hair on," which remarks never failed to make Black Jack feel what a jolly set they were and how firmly to be depended on.

The Buffer had a long head. He gave its wisdom up to tremendous calculation. Many things which no one else would have thought of, he collected—such as scissors

and cord, and wire, bandages and "chargals" for water, which last proved of incalculable value afterwards. It was he, too, who decided on the date, fixed by the phase of the moon, since they must inevitably hide in the day and travel by night.

There was such a recklessness upon them, such a headlong determination to break away at all risks, that there was no thought of postponement in any mind, though no workable plot was yet formulated.

It was, indeed, but three nights before they actually started, that the way out was shown to them—and after the most unexpected fashion. One of their two Turkish guards came over to John Tempest's bedside, while his companions slept, and woke him with great precaution. Tempest, the only one who knew any Turkish, was interpreter to the party. Whispering heavily, the guard informed him that he was well aware of their preparations and offered to help them, even to the extent of leading them forth himself and guiding them across the worst part of the way—for a consideration! He himself had long wanted to desert (so he told Black Jack); alone he was sure of safety among his own people. But, of course, with such companions there would be risks, and the risks must be made worth his while. The bribe suggested was staggering, and John Tempest with due precaution convened his companions to instant consultation.

It was not a question of whether they would, but whether they could, pay. Neither of the Johns, or Rumty, could rise to much. But the Buffer had money, and Old Codger was the son of a millionaire. There was no hesitation possible. If it had been for all they had, the price of freedom would yet have had to be forthcoming.

"Clarence"—so they had nicknamed the guard—was

promised all the available funds that might now be spared, and a solemn contract on paper for the rest. It says volumes for our repute in the East that the bond of an English officer was good security to the Turk, all through the years of war.

The child of Islam began forthwith to develop his suggestions. Very neat and complete they were, with moreover the ineffable merit of simplicity.

His colleague, "Obadiah," as the prisoners dubbed him (after some ribald chaunt of Rumty's), was, Clarence opined, a very bad Mussulman, and a hog besides. It would be quite easy to make him drunk. If enough money was given, enough liquor would be produced to make Obadiah blind and deaf in a short time. But to make quite sure of no inconvenient interruption, Clarence thought that the Buffer might supply him with some of his opium pills besides, wherewith to improve the beverage. When Obadiah had reached the desirable condition, all would be easy. Captain Tempest could change clothes with the unconscious man and, if he let his beard grow for a few days and rubbed dirt on his face, and pulled the cap over his eyes, there was nothing to prevent his marching out as Obadiah with one prisoner in broad daylight, according to the daily custom. As for the other three, Clarence himself would obtain leave for them to go to the bath house, as a special favor. The real Obadiah, meanwhile, could be left in the sick gentleman's bunk, in his pig's sleep. Could anything be more guilelessly natural, more simple, more plain sailing? Far better than their imbecile idea—the officer would forgive his saying so—of trying to get off in the night with the sentries all about the courtyard, and the dogs loose.

It seemed delightful.

"But what's to happen, after we are out in the broad daylight?—Ask him that, Black Jack," said the Buffer.

"He says," translated Tempest, "that we are to leave it to him. He has a lovely plan, and will get us safely to some spot where we can hide till nightfall."

"He's a rotten blackguard," pondered the Buffer, "but the loot he hopes to get out of us is so monstrously beyond anything he could ever screw from his own blasted people, if he sold us twenty times over, that I think, boys, we'll just have to take the leap."

Blind drunk, deaf drunk, an inert mass of humanity stertorously breathing, Obadiah lay before them on the floor. Clarence had kept his word.

None of them had much sleep that night; and they had listened with considerable emotion to the gurgles in Obadiah's throat as he drank. The victim had passed successively through the jovial stage and the quarrelsome stage, but after the broaching of the second, and doped, flask, he had sunk very rapidly into lethargy. The prisoners in their heroic irrepressible buoyancy had been highly amused. Black Jack was freely chaffed over the exchange of clothes.

Under the Buffer's hands his make-up was a source of Homeric laughter. Some red ink had been discovered at the bazaar, and the touching up of the nose was voted artistic to the last degree. John Tempest had more than one shudder of disgust as he got into the greasy uniform. But he laughed with the others, especially when, as a freakish last touch, he hung his own identification disk round the filthy neck.

Twelve hours afterwards they were marching along in the moonlight, for the time being at least, free men.

They could permit themselves to believe in their luck. Clarence had been better than his word. He had shown indeed a remarkable gift of intrigue. The three whom he had escorted to the baths had been hidden in an empty well. The other two, covered up in a market cart, were conveyed out of the town, to be deposited two miles away under a bridge where the others duly picked them up after the first hour of darkness.

There ensued strange and wonderful days. They were like men possessed with unnatural happiness, unnatural courage, unnatural confidence. Clarence seemed to have friends in every village, to have a fox's knowledge of the secret places of the hills. He brought them to water springs and wells as the nomad shepherd his flock. He contrived many a lift, here and there, for Seneschal, by borrowing a donkey from village to village. They began to travel by day as well as night, for it was urgent to cross the ranges in the bright, early autumn weather, before the season of storms and mists should break over them. But they were gradually being led considerably out of the course they had originally planned, and the drain upon what remained of their money resources became serious. Anxiety gathered on the Buffer's brow. He hesitated to quarrel with the insinuating Clarence; nevertheless a limit had to be put—and that promptly—both to the divergence from the route and to the remorseless blackmailing.

John Seneschal suddenly and desperately complicated the situation. He had been so cheery, so unflagging, so eager, that even John Tempest had thought him, if not cured, certainly on a fair way to health. One evening, although he had marched to the chosen camping ground with as swinging a step as the rest of them, he had sat

down suddenly, turned livid, cast at Tempest a look like a child imploring; had choked, coughed and fallen forward, the blood welling from his mouth.

The first hemorrhage! It was, however, fortunately, not a serious one. There was plenty of ice-cold water in the rushing rivulet to which Clarence had brought them. They made the best bed possible under the lee of a rock; covered him up with all their available wraps, and the Buffer prescribed an opium pill every four hours. John Seneschal, mercifully soothed, slept heavily. Then the others held a council of war.

Clarence, of course, was much to the fore, and, deeply as they were beginning to distrust him, there seemed nothing for it but to fall in with his suggestion. It was ingenious enough—the Buffer, who could speak the Boches' lingo, was to masquerade as a German officer, and with Rumty and Old Codger, acting the Hun orderlies as convincingly as they could, were to penetrate into the rather considerable town, the lights of which were actually glimmering through the darkness at them half a mile away. Here they must seek the Headman, represent themselves as a surveying party, and demand assistance for a sick colleague.

Clarence declared that nothing could be easier, he being there mercifully to explain and interpret, and giving himself out as a member of the company under the engineer captain's orders, by arrangement with the Turkish authorities. The Headman would know no German. No one would dream of suspecting Clarence, a Turkish soldier in his uniform, a man of so fine an appearance and so honest a countenance! They must demand a house in the Town for the fever-stricken lieutenant of engineers and feed him with much milk. When he was better, they

must commandeer a donkey for him to take him on again to the coast.

It sounded plausible, comforting, not to say hopeful. But the Buffer whistled through his teeth and did not unknit his pondering brow, even when all was settled. After the scheme had been sufficiently discussed, and Clarence dismissed from their circle, he sat long, staring into the camp fire, revolving contingencies, vainly racking his brain for a better solution.

"I don't like it," he said to Rumty. "I've no faith in it. Clarence—why did we call him Clarence?—False, perjured Clarence!—is as false as hell. But we've got to risk it. I see nothing for it."

"Yes, sir," said the others quietly, as if taking orders.

The next morning there was no laughing or joking over the make-up, as there had been in the mud hovel a fortnight ago. They were chilled to the bone for one thing, after the icy experience of the night; everything they could spare was wrapped round Brown John.

They boiled water, made coffee and shaved. Seneschal had had no return of hemorrhage and had been able to swallow some coffee before sinking back into his drugged sleep.

It fell out quite naturally again that Tempest should be the one to remain with him. He could speak Turkish, should any wandering shepherd or inquisitive individual stroll across their hiding place. And his Turkish uniform would keep up the rôle agreed upon, of assistant engineer. The Buffer and he had had a long talk together in the dawn, and it had left him steady-hearted.

He now sat on a stone beside Seneschal, who, between the exhaustion and the opiate, lay still as a dead man;

the others came and looked at him in mute farewell. The Buffer, however, lingered and spoke to Tempest.

"So long, old chap—we'll hope for the best. If we are not back by nightfall, you'd better trek with the poor lad there—as soon as you can. 'Pon my word, I could wish he'd slip away now. There's the knapsack stuffed with all the food, and the compass, maps, matches and the rest of it. It looks to me as if you'd find a fairly good bit of cover in those rocks the other side of the stream. Your best chance, anyhow—if we don't come back."

He paused. Tempest nodded. Not a ha'porth of use in jawing when you'd got to such a point as this.

"You needn't give us up for a few days, you know," said the Buffer with a smile. "But keep your eye on that road, and take no risks. So long——"

"Good luck!" said Black Joe. He jerked up his head and nodded back. He would die rather than let the Buffer see how these precautions had depressed him. Clarence was a dirty thief; but, after all, why should he sell his milch cows so soon?

He had sworn to bring Seneschal home. He would do it yet in the teeth of Fate! But, as the Buffer marched away, there came on Black Jack a horrible certainty—rising like a cloud over his soul—that he had gazed his last on that kindly, high-bred face. The blue eyes had had the look in them—the look he knew and dreaded.

He watched the four figures swing along the length of road that was visible from the hillside valley, steadily wheel round the corner and disappear. He watched that road, off and on, through the rest of the day, between what light services he could do for Seneschal, in vain. They never came back. Neither was there sign of Clarence or any emissary of his.

At nightfall he sat beside Brown John, took his hand and, seeing that the effects of the drug had cleared from his mind and that the thing could not be kept from him, told him how they stood.

"There's just you and I left, old chappie. I'm game if you are. We'll not toss up the sponge. I'll get you home yet!"

Many deeds that seemed superhuman were done daily during this war in the heat of battle; but the long steadfastness, the enduring heroism of those forgotten ones who kept courage and faith through the years of imprisonment, of those whose spirit their jailers sought in vain to break, was surely the greatest miracle of all.

John Seneschal and John Tempest were still prisoners; the whole cruel waste of Anatolia was their prison house. Though they had broken narrower bonds, the forces of nature, their own physical necessities, were barriers to ultimate liberty far more threatening; perhaps invincible. And one of them was in the grip of a relentless enemy, carried within himself, a foe to whom he must eventually succumb. Nevertheless to neither of them came a thought of giving up.

Brown John did not suggest to Black Jack to abandon him in the wilderness and fend for himself, because he loved his comrade too well to insult him. And Black Jack carried on with the same cheerful energy as if the goal of their endeavors were already in sight and it needed but a spurt to reach it. He found a place among the rocks where they could hide and take shelter, as the Buffer had suggested. And thither, the first night of their abandonment, he carried Brown John.

They were near water and the knapsacks contained a

supply of oxo and ovaltine which would suffice for the invalid for quite a long time.

Good old Buffer! When Tempest examined the packages he found a roll of Turkish notes and gold, and the case with the precious medicines; and—he nearly broke down over this—a carefully jotted memorandum of suggested treatment for the sick man. Good old Buffer! Never had been a more gallant gentleman . . . Tempest knew, with the conviction beyond argument, or even reason, that he and the others were gone. Nevertheless he could not bring himself to leave the district till the couple of days he had been bidden to hang about had extended to seven.

In their hours of close companionship the last reserves broke down between the two friends, and John Tempest was admitted into the secret places of John Seneschal's soul. He first heard then of Margaret Amber; of the love that had grown with his growth; of the irresponsible unkindness that had separated them and, as far as such youth can be broken, had broken John Seneschal's life. Tempest wondered why, seeing that their affection for each other had never faltered, the lovers should not, by this time, have come together. But he understood better when he heard how great an heiress Miss Amber was, and how impossible it seemed either for John to draw her out to India into his poor and dangerous life, or to go home with nothing but a third son's disabilities to offer her. He was peculiarly handicapped, too, by his parents' opposition, and the fact that Edward, the elder brother, heir to Thornbarrow, had been himself in love with Margaret, and, championed by Lady Seneschal, had been pushed forward in every way as the eligible, the destined suitor.

"My mother always had a down on me," said Brown John in gloomy reminiscence, "and, by George, when she wanted a thing she'd break any man's spirit. Father never could stand up to her. And she jolly well parted us. Got rid of me to an Indian regiment, and saw that father kept me so tight that if I chucked that I'd have nothing to live on. Not that Margaret would have cared. But you see, old chap, she was not yet twenty-one. And she had promised her father to wait till the year over that . . . and then the war broke out——"

And there it was. Not the first love story that the World War had torn across in the opening chapter.

John Tempest was shown the photograph under the ivory tablet in John Seneschal's pocketbook. It had been a gift from her, on the occasion of her twenty-first birthday. She had had the photograph done on purpose and it was exactly like her.

John Tempest, sitting in the meager shadow of a rock while the blinding Asiatic sun made a glorious inferno of the world around, gazed long at the portrait. It was just a head on a cabinet-size print.

"She looks—topping," he said, after a prolonged consideration.

The other man stretched out his wasted hand, jealously.

"Give it back. Yes, she is—topping."

He gazed long in his turn and John Tempest saw him bite his lip and breathe quickly through his nostrils, as a man does when pain catches him. An echo of the same pain caught him who was only "the friend of the bridegroom." He hurried on cheerily:

"Never saw such jolly eyes! They look at you—hang it all—as straight as a man's! Do you know, old chap, I'd say that girl would get anything she'd set her heart

on, just from the one glance I've had of her there. She'd not let go in a hurry. That's the way it strikes me."

"No—God bless her!"

"I'll back her against your mother any day."

Brown John had a sad, satiric smile.

"Oh, mother's precious civil to me now. I'm all she's got left, you see, since Ned and Steve went West. She'll be as much for me and Margaret now, as ever she was against us—if I get back."

His hand shook as he drew the ivory panel again over his treasure and shut the pocketbook. It was bulky with letters.

"Couldn't keep them all, you know," he told his companion. "Burnt a lot of them at Kut before we jacked up. And it's the devil; we've scarce got a letter through to each other, since. In the end, none at all. Six months since I've heard a word! As for mine, God knows where they've gone to. That fellow at Kara-Hissar, he had a grudge against me. Devil knows what he burked and looted!—Oh, Lord!"

John Seneschal gave a sigh which merged into a yawn of uttermost weariness.

"Gorblimy!" cried Tempest, "if I'd a girl like that to come home to, I'd never say die!"

"I won't say die!"

The sick man's eyes flashed fire; and John Tempest cursed the heat which made a fellow feel, somehow, a bit sick.

There is no disease more capricious in its progress than the one which had hold of John Seneschal. It plays with its victims as the cat plays with the mouse. Its respites are perhaps the worst of its cruelties. But the

respite which was now granted to Brown John was, however productive of false hopes, in so far a benefit that it permitted of progress on the journey.

They got along—somehow. The fact remained; they got along.

II

How had they ever done it? If he could have stopped to think at all, if he had dared allow himself to think, John Tempest might well have asked himself that question.

A firm determination drove them, on either side. In the end it began to seem not so much their own power that kept them going, but that of Fate. Seneschal must have died long ago, Tempest would tell himself sometimes, if there were not something predestinate about it all. The hour actually dawned when, from the height of a hill crest, they beheld a far, far, distant streak—which was the sea. Beyond reaching the coast, they had had, from the first, scarcely any plan. It seemed to them that a boat must be easy come by. They had spent but little of the Buffer's money; they could give a draft for more, with the certainty of its being faithfully met on the other side. Therefore was the bright streak, all those miles away, like the vision of the Promised Land.

If despair had ever been in their private thought—if it had taken seat in the inner sanctum and been hard to drive out—it was expelled now. Yet the claw of the cat was raised to strike. The very day of that upleap of hope, it struck; and the talons were driven deep into both their hearts.

From that sunset hour John Seneschal began to flag again, though a most unexpected assistance was forthcoming. In their slow descent of the ranges they came

upon the tents of nomad Circassians, friendly people who accepted John Tempest's uniform and his acquired Turkish in all good faith, and made no difficulty about selling milk and curds for the invalid. Tempest sometimes thought that if he had been able to obtain this food for his comrade a fortnight before they might have averted the breakdown. With the open-air existence they were leading, in the high purity of the mountain atmosphere, with food and rest, might he not have saved Seneschal? But with tinned stuff—and that exiguous enough—the chupatties he could not swallow—with the unrelenting exertions to advance, since another week in the mountain would have made the cold intolerable; with the appalling alternations of temperature—the noonday devil of heat, the icy grip of midnight—what chance had there been for a stricken man?

Day by day, nay, even hour by hour, another little strand in the cable of hope that had drawn them such immense distances, through such unbelievable hardships, began to give way, fretted through, as it were, by the shears of the Dread Sister.

Tempest got to think that if he could convey his comrade alive to Cyprus, so that the poor chap could at least die out of the land of bondage, it was as much as he could dare count on. His uttermost optimism certainly brought him no further than the picture of Margaret Amber summoned by telegram to a death-bed.

Seneschal, at this point, became a creature of silence. His friend guessed that he dared not speak, for fear of some explosion of irritation or passion; that his worn-out nerves were on the very edge of endurance.

One explosion there was, the day when, at his wits' end, Tempest suggested their giving themselves up. There

was a fairly big town on their road; and he thought a doctor, a bed—shelter at least, and rest, might be worth the sacrifice.

"You said, if I dropped, I'd drop free. Don't forget that. Do you think I've changed? Do you think I wouldn't rather die out here than buy life in a damned prison?"

"Keep your hair on," said Tempest, borrowing the Buffer's slang for the occasion.

They got on again, after this—walking perhaps a couple of miles a day. They were reckless, and besides it was impossible to get any one so feeble across the ground at night.

As it was, what a torture it became! The sick man had to lie down on the road half an hour, sometimes, for every ten minutes he could walk. And then the other, his arm about his comrade, half carrying him indeed, would count the steps aloud from point to point, to encourage him. "One, two, three, four, five . . . Capital, old man! We are getting along."

They got down into a strange waterless valley—waterless, that is to say, save for an almost empty well—where the mountain streams seemed to have been diverted from their courses, and whole small settlements of what had been once apparently prosperous farms had been abandoned in consequence. Here, in a half-ruined farmhouse, Tempest made a sleeping place for Seneschal—the best he had had since the camp at Kara-Hissar. He found straw, he found fuel; and there was a real hearth in which to make a fire. He built a great fire, and by its light they talked far into the night. Seneschal was more like himself than he had been for a long time. And yet there was

a difference, too; for the yearnings and longings that had been as a mental fever seemed to have dropped from him. He was like a man whom the fever has left, wonderfully quieted.

He spoke of possibilities. He felt better, he said. Thought it was just a toss-up he might do it after all. Fellows with rattled lungs like his held on a long time. He had seen dozens of them, himself; you thought they were dead, and they were game for years. Saw other chaps down, sometimes. On the other hand, he was well aware next day might see the end of him. He wanted to feel he hadn't any bally last thing to say. He'd like to say it now, please.

"Yes, please, old man—such a splendid pal as you've been!—you must let me have it out."

"Well, if it eases your mind, old chap."

Tempest threw more wood on the fire.

"Yes, it will ease my mind."

Brown John had been thinking a lot, he told his friend. And he had come to the conclusion that it was jolly dangerous for Black Jack to be going about in Turkish soldier's clothes. If he fell into the hands of the enemy, he would be shot for a spy, as sure as eggs. Or, in the unlikely contingency of his being able to keep up the bluff, for a deserter.

"You nip into my togs, old man, the moment the breath's out of my body. And bury or burn the rags you've on. You promise me that? You swear you'll do that?"

Of course Tempest swore.

"You needn't bury me in 'em, though."

"Oh, damn, do you think I'd do that?"

Well, this was the most urgent. It seemed hardly

necessary to ask the comrade to bring the news of him home; to see Margaret Amber, and tell her—no—Tempest must just give her the pocketbook.

"She'll find all I want her to know, there. Only, take out the photograph—bury that with me. As for father and mother, if it wasn't for Ned and Steve having gone, it wouldn't much matter to them. I've been a briary chap, and a dreamer, and all that. Not a bit of use to them. But now, of course—oh, hang it, what's the good of going over that!"

They talked of Thornbarrow then, a little; and Seneschall dozed and started; coughed and dozed.

Tempest did not attempt to go to sleep at all. It was not that he thought his companion worse; indeed, there seemed to be some reason for his own assertion that he was better. But there was a restlessness in the watcher's spirit; a quite childish feeling that, by his own wakefulness, he was keeping guard against the enemy, warding off hovering calamity.

Day was just dawning when a paroxysm of coughing brought him to his friend's side. When it was over, Seneschal began to speak of the Buffer. It had been tacitly recognized between them that the Buffer was dead, but they had never touched on the dreadful mystery of what had happened. Did Black Jack remember how the Buffer had walked all the long march from Kut to Assizish because, all Colonel as he was, he would not ride when his men tramped? And what days of brass it had been! And did Black Jack know that the Buffer would never as much as sit down till he had seen his men settled? He used to start off to help dig them in with his own hand. . . . "Good old Buffer," murmured Seneschal, and dropped to sleep with a smile on his lips.

When he woke, Tempest saw by the broadening light that a change had come over his face. The shadow had fallen on it. Seneschal was staring at him with wide eyes and did not know him. His mind was still running on the Buffer; he thought the Buffer was calling; he wanted to get up and get ready. It was all that Tempest could do to soothe him. At last Brown John lay down declaring, twice over, very distinctly, that he would start at sundown.

At midday he fell into unconsciousness and at sundown he died.

Just at the very last he had looked at Tempest and smiled. The smile never quite faded from his lips. It was the only comfort left to the one who survived.

In the dawn, John Tempest dug a grave in a patch that had once been the garden of the Circassian farmer's wife. Then, as the light was broadening, he put on his friend's clothes, hung his friend's disk upon his own neck, slipped his friend's ring on his own finger.

Before reverently wrapping the body in the khaki overcoat which the Buffer had left over him that day of parting, he had drawn Margaret Amber's portrait out of the pocketbook and set it over the heart that had loved her to its last beat. But—perhaps he was a little light-headed, between watching and grief and the awful loneliness—it suddenly came to him when he had laid the poor light body in the shallow grave, that he could not hide away the girl's young, eager face with the dead. He caught up the picture from the cold breast; and, with stammering prayers, shoveled in the sand and the stones.

Then he rolled a bowlder from the bed of the dried up stream and marked the spot. As he turned away the

sun was already beating fiercely on his head. He pulled out the leather case and the photograph from the pocket into which he had thrust them loosely together, and looked at the picture of John Seneschal's love.

"No, Margaret, beautiful Margaret," he said, "you shall not go down into the grave, too!"

Shaken with long shudders, he never saw, as he slipped the picture back into place, that the ivory tablet had dropped from his fingers and lay, blinding white, on the sand at his feet.

He went back into the farmhouse, flung the rags of the Turkish uniform upon the smoldering ashes, and started off, staggering southward, towards the sea.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

JOHN SENESCHAL'S MOTHER

LADY SENESCHAL drew herself up, closed her eyes tight, as her trick was when she meant not to be interrupted, and proceeded:

"Of course, when I say, doctor—I wonder if I ought to call you colonel, or major, or captain; one never knows nowadays, does one? However, it doesn't prevent your being a doctor. No, of course not. Absurd, absurd! I'll call you doctor. You were that first, you say. Of course you must have been. Absurd! But, about insanity: horrid word, isn't it? No, no, I quite understand, it's not a case of insanity. Still, you think it wiser to inquire? Naturally."

Lady Seneschal drew herself up again, having insensibly drooped during these remarks which fell from her lips with a dry patter, like shots from some miniature machine gun, closed her eyes tighter and began afresh.

"There never was any insanity in my family—in my family. In my family. I'm an Elliott, you know. Born an Elliott. Scotch people are supposed to have rather shrewd wits, what're called canny.—Canny, canny, Elliott, not Scotch, perhaps. Border—but very nearly the same thing, what? I'm sure my dear father was the shrewdest man of business. A lawyer, quite a lawyer. 'Every man his own lawyer,' that was his motto. You know what I mean, his motto. And he carried it out, he carried it out."

She opened her eyes suddenly. Though rather close together and small, they were of so vivid a blue, set in a countenance so delicately chiseled, so prettily colored, that the busy doctor found more patience at his disposal than he might have had if the extremely loquacious visitor had presented the usual unattractive aspect of middle age.

He himself was a man of few words.

"Can you say the same of the Seneschals?"

"Oh, my dear doctor, doctor, doctor!" cried the other. "It's not very easy—it's not very easy to answer for a family like that; so many cousins and uncles, and aunts, and the—to be quite frank, to be quite frank, the heir *in partibus*—that's what they call it, I believe—I mean the young man who would come after my dear boy, the dear boy, under your care—our only one now, you know, the last hope of the Seneschals. I call him the last hope because of the next of kin, Edward Seneschal-Smith, you know, young Ned, well—his father was a ne'er-do-well, and my husband had to forbid him the house, forbid him Thornbarrow, and the son has taken after him: I can say no more than that—he's what—what a gentleman would call, what my other dear boys used to call—a rotter—a rotter, yes, rotter!"

She paused a moment, with a little smile at the reminiscence—a smile, thought the observer, strange indeed on the lips of one who in referring to those gallant youths, persons, must at the same moment remember a double grave in desolate Flanders. Dr. Caldwell knew, as did every one, that the brothers Seneschal had been killed on the same day. It was a circumstance which made the case of the third son, now lying in a separate room of this private hospital, more than ordinarily anxious.

"I see."

The mother had started off again. All the doctor could do was to look for the first opening that he might slip in words sufficient to guide this copious flood of speech into some profitable channel of information. Certainly, he agreed with Lady Seneschal, to be a rotter might show deficiency of will power, but not necessarily mental infirmity. And that Lady Seneschal the dowager, well over eighty-five, should happen to have delusions was only in the course of nature.

"Though you wouldn't believe, Doctor, how sharp she can be when she likes—sharp as a weadle—no, no, I mean a neasel, of course, a neasel."

She continued to dwell on this nonsense-word as if by repetition she could insure its correctness. Dr. Caldwell, his satiric gaze fixed upon her under frowning eyebrows, intervened.

"Now, with regard to Captain Seneschal himself, was he a normal child?"

"Oh, normal!" Again the mother opened her eyes, flax-flower blue, upon him; and the pretty, faint smile hovered about her lips. "I suppose every mother thinks her children wonderful. Her geese are all swans. What, what? My boys were beautiful boys, beautiful boys. Edward and Stephen, my poor dear sons, my poor dear sons—you couldn't have seen finer fellows."

She closed her eyes; and this time Dr. Caldwell believed that there were natural tears behind the lids. But the reminiscent smile still played over the pink-and-white face.

"They were both fair. All the Seneschals are fair. I'm fair. But John, little John was dark—dark, dark. I used to wonder where he got it from. He never was much of a Seneschal—nor yet an Elliott. Scotch people, or

rather Border people—same thing—are usually sandy. I was rather sandy myself before my hair turned gray. Of course, polite people called it auburn, auburn. But there was little John—well, you've seen him, you know—black as a gypsy."

"His eyes are hazel," interrupted the man.

She, however, was pursuing her own branching thought.

"Dark in face, and his hair black. You'll admit his hair's black—oh, you'll admit black hair and olive skin make a dark man. There's Spanish blood, remember, at the back of the Seneschals. I always said it came out in him. Temper, too. Temper, obstinacy. Temper, temper! He never got on at home."

Seated at his writing table, in the quiet small room allotted to him, in Lady Clontarf's hospital in Brook Street, the surgeon in charge was reflecting. If he himself had been afflicted with such a talkative parent, he had no doubt but what he might have found home trying. Nevertheless, temper and obstinacy were facts which might have considerable bearing upon the situation.

"Lady Seneschal," he said, suddenly, shooting at her a look before which her self-complacent ramblings faltered, "will you kindly give me your attention for ten minutes—without speaking, please?—and I will briefly recapitulate the salient points of your son's case, which I think you have hardly yet grasped. Captain Seneschal had been, I understand, five or six years in India with his regiment before the war." He was turning over the pages of his note-book as he spoke, and now paused over an entry—"the 113th infantry—a native regiment."

Lady Seneschal closed her eyes and opened her mouth.

"I think you must let me say one word. Turn about, turn about's fair play—what? I am sure it seems very

strange to you that we should have put a son of ours into an Indian regiment. A Seneschal, a Seneschal. My poor dear father said to me—he was alive at the time—he said to me, 'Amelia, it's shoddy. It's shoddy!"

"I assure you, Lady Seneschal——"

"Oh, no, you needn't be polite. It *is* shoddy, it *was* shoddy. But what were we to do? There were reasons. Very serious reasons. He didn't want to go into the army. He said he'd rather plow."

Dr. Caldwell now made no attempt to interrupt. She was at last giving him information which might be valuable.

"You see how it was? His father said, and very justly, family rule, family rule, the second for the church or for diplomacy, and the third for the army. We had great difficulty with John. His father had great difficulty with him. There were reasons. His father and he were quite at loggerheads. He defied his father. Sir Edward insisted. Discipline, discipline. It was very important to get John out of England for some years. I ask you what could we do? Three sons to provide for. Landowners, nowadays, I say, no joke——"

Dr. Caldwell, perceiving that the impending divagation was likely to be an extensive one, interposed with an energy which he felt, himself, to be slightly brutal, but which his visitor accepted with a little resigned air that showed her not unaccustomed to such treatment.

"Captain Seneschal," he read out from his notes, "113th infantry, was with General Townsend's force at Kut. He went through the siege, was taken by the Turks, and, after nearly three years' imprisonment, contrived to escape with some companions. Upon the retreat of the Turks before our advance, he was found in a hospital

at Aleppo apparently the sole survivor of the party, suffering from head and other wounds."

Lady Seneschal gave a little groan, and the doctor paused in deference to this symptom of maternal feeling.

"The patient," he resumed, "has been able to give no trustworthy account of his experiences. When he was found he was in high fever from neglect and privation. If he had not possessed an iron constitution, he could not have survived." The doctor raised a hand to avert the imminent cataract, and proceeded in short, quick sentences. "He was identified in the usual manner: disk, private papers, and the rest of it. His family were communicated with. As soon as it was at all possible he was moved to a hospital ship, safely landed and brought here. He has now been under my care a week. I requested you and Sir Edward to defer your visit until I had had the case under observation for some time. Yes, Lady Seneschal, I understand that Sir Edward's state of health precludes such an ordeal for him. Yes, yes, I quite understand. The shock of his recent losses—yes, indeed. As you say, even the joyful shock of knowing his last son safe after very conflicting reports!—he is not in a state to bear much more. No, that I can well believe. And it was as much for his sake as your own that you have insisted on coming to-day. It is your right, Lady Seneschal. I would not deny it if I could, and indeed as matters stand, I am not sure that even medically speaking, I should wish to do so."

Lady Seneschal, who had been sitting with her eyes closed, looked up, gave a little smile, but to his astonishment did not avail herself of his pause. He proceeded, in a less repressive manner:

"Now—in one way—the patient is doing very well.

Wounds healing nicely. Healed, I may say. Strength returning. Sleep—well, no, the nights are not good; but there's nothing alarming about that. I have had any amount of the same kind of thing. They often wander at night. Captain Seneschal's night delirium, I may call it so, takes however a very different form from the usual. He's not fighting his battles over again; he goes back, chiefly, to the life at home. Yes, Lady Seneschal, it is Thornbarrow all the time; the fields, the woods, with old Roger—the keeper, I take it?"

"Dear me," said Lady Seneschal, blinking and smiling, "he has not been home for eight years, you know! He was always very fond of the old place, I will say that for him."

Dr. Caldwell looked with some severity at the graceful figure in a mourning which was already delicately relieved with hints of mauve.

"There are characters in whom attachment to home is a passion," he remarked. "Captain Seneschal has been long an exile. Did you say eight years? He has probably brooded over memories; longed for home till passion has become obsession. It quite fits in with my conception of the case. Then there is a name which recurs frequently; Margaret—his sister, perhaps?"

Lady Seneschal started. Her blue eyes flashed.

"What," she exclaimed eagerly. "You don't say it's Margaret with him still?" The whole pretty, faded countenance softened and brightened. "And why not—and why not? Of course, there is no reason against it now. Oh! dear no, Margaret is not his sister. What an absurd idea! No, no, no. Young men don't usually rave about their sisters! His sister? Oh, of course not. She's—well—better be discreet—discreet. To tell you the

truth, she's a very charming young lady, very well off. And that, I always say, spoils nothing.—So he speaks of Margaret? We meant our eldest son to marry Margaret. Now—of course——"

The doctor looked a moment very piercingly at his visitor, then dropped his gaze and began to reflect. His first impression had been that here was a mind of harmless vapidity, lodged in a personality so gracefully attractive that the mere male must always regard it with an indulgent eye, and might even find such foolishness more charming than the wisdom of sterner matrons. Every time she moved there was a faint fragrance of violets in the air. The delicate gesticulating hands were clothed in suede gloves of an exquisite texture. The art with which the black tailor-made defined the long slender limbs; the simplicity of the wide brimmed hat set on hair, which may once have been "sandy" but was now indescribably silver, light as a vapor touched by moon rays—spoke of an excellent fastidiousness. Yet, here was a woman who had lost two sons in a single day, whose only surviving son lay upstairs, shattered by unbelievable experiences. Dr. Caldwell had a sudden vision of that prone splendor of manhood, those haunted eyes with their piteous appeal for the help which no one could give. He began to feel disgusted.

"And so you see, Doctor, I haven't such an easy card to play. Sir Edward is very irritable, very irritable. Of course, poor fellow, it's his health. But I assure you, if I were to miss the afternoon train, he'd quite make a grievance of it. He'd be quite annoyed: Grumpy, grumpy, grumpy. You know, grumpy. Of course I know it's his health. His kidneys are all wrong. You know what it means? Kidney complaint. As our own

doctor says, the local doctor—country, country, country, but quite a good man—'you must give in to him, Lady Seneschal, you can't thwart him.' It's physical—physical—I don't want to hurry you. But—an appointment with the dressmaker! Since I was coming up I thought I might as well kill two birds with one stone. That's a way of putting it, isn't it? Two birds. Two birds. Woman's business, you know, dressmaker. Woman, dressmaker. A man goes to his broker, a woman to her dressmaker. Woman's business, what?"

He would have smiled at the suggestion that the waste of time was on his side, had it not been for the gravity of the communication he must impart to her. As it was, the sense of her frivolity made him abandon any attempt to soften it.

"Before bringing you up to the patient, Lady Seneschal, I must explain to you what I meant when I wrote that he was suffering from delusions. Parts of Captain Seneschal's brain are, as it were, in abeyance. He has lost all memory on certain points. He has one very marked delusion. He denies his own identity."

"Good gracious! Denies his?—what do you mean, doctor?"

"I mean that when your son is addressed as Captain Seneschal, he invariably makes the same answer: 'Seneschal is dead.' On two or three occasions the sister in charge has tried to reason it out with him. I have forbidden this. He gets excited and declares that he ought to know, having himself buried John Seneschal. If, then, he is asked whom he believes himself to be, he becomes increasedly distressed, puts his hand to his forehead, and either replies 'I don't know, I can't remember his name';

or else, with a show of anger: 'the other fellow, of course.' "

Lady Seneschal had risen.

"I never heard of such a thing!" Her tone of angry distress the doctor thought threw another sidelight upon her mentality. She was of those tiresome beings who resent their own misfortunes upon others. The look she cast on him was furious. "I never heard of such a thing. I say it passes the realms; it passes the realms of fancy. I've heard of delusions. My mother-in-law has delusions. But to think you're dead and buried, it passes the realms of fancy. You mustn't allow it, Doctor, you must do something."

"There can be no question of operating on Captain Seneschal—at least not at present." The doctor was angry in his turn, and his voice rang out. "We must, at least, give time a chance."

"Operate?" Lady Seneschal grew scarlet. She began to scream. "I forbid it. I—you doctors are all for operations. Murder half the time, murder I call it. Murder—murder! His father and I will never consent."

Dr. Caldwell looked like a man who has been surprised by a squall. He waited till the first rush had passed; and then, as the excited woman had to pause for breath, put in a quiet,

"You misunderstand me. I am telling you that I, too, would object to an operation at present in this case."

But if he had thought to receive the apology that was his due, he little knew the temper he had to deal with. Lady Seneschal continued her whirlwind objurgations, with a note of triumph added.

"You can't do it without the consent of the parents. I know that—I know that—I know that. Object? I

like that. It is for us to object. I'll not have my son's life risked. The last son! What is a life to you doctors? It is just a toss-up. I know that. You are all burning to experiment. Oh, I know, I know. Interest of science—and all the horrid things you do with the poor little rabbits. But my son's not a rabbit. I say, my son's not a rabbit!"

Nothing for it but, metaphorically, to turn up the collar of your coat and set your back to the storm! As the surgeon waited for a lull, he went on reflecting. Here was another sidelight. Lady Seneschal was determined to preserve the heir, at all costs. She would be capable, he thought, of preferring even idiocy for her son to the risk of losing him. Her husband, by her own account, was a man whose days were already numbered. Thornbarrow and all the Seneschal estates were dependent on that life upstairs. That was the thought that dominated the mother's mind.

"You may be sure," he said soothingly, when the opening came, "that your wishes will be respected in every particular——" No good arguing here. "I see no reason why memory should not return to Captain Seneschal in due course. I have known this to occur quite suddenly. I should like him to be brought home in a couple of weeks and should there be no improvement, say in three months, we can always try the effect of a rest cure in one or other of the sanatoriums which have been founded for similar cases. But I have great faith in the beneficial results of old associations, pleasant surroundings; of the home, in fine, for which he seems to have such a craving.—Now Lady Seneschal, before I bring you up to your son, remember—you must not attempt to force recognition. If it does not come naturally, there is

nothing for it but to be resigned for the present. You will kindly just step up to the bed and call him by name, very gently. I can allow no conversation, no wrangling. I cannot sufficiently impress upon you the importance of not agitating or disturbing him. In fact, I will not answer for the consequences, if you do."

"I think you forget," said Lady Seneschal with dignity, "that you are speaking to his mother."

CHAPTER II

JOHN SENESCHAL'S BETROTHED

DR. CALDWELL watched Lady Seneschal's face as she stepped to the bedside. He himself was accustomed to the emaciation, the exhaustion of the long gaunt figure that lay there, a living testimony to protracted mental and physical agonies, to superhuman endurances. There was a bandage round the dark head, throwing into relief the livid discoloration of the skin where the copper tan of fierce exposure overlay a sickly pallor. This woman had last seen her son in all the vigor and comeliness of adolescence! The doctor wondered whether it would not have been more prudent to prepare her for a shock. He saw her lips, pursed into a small conventional smile as she tip-toed into the room, fall apart with the sudden dropping of the jaw. He saw her bright shallow eyes start and become fixed in horror. It was quite natural that she should think she was looking on a doomed man; it would take professional acumen to realize that here, on the contrary, was a promising recovery.

"He's not asleep," whispered the nurse in charge.

Dr. Caldwell had taken his post on the further side of the bed. He now bent and said in a pleasant, every-day manner:

"I have brought you a visitor."

The young man opened his eyes, glanced rather wildly up, then smiled with an effort. Those hazel eyes, of

which the mother had spoken, were restless and over bright in their shadowed setting.

The doctor straightened himself and made a gesture of command to the visitor. His glance warned and threatened: "Pull yourself together, woman!"

Lady Seneschal flung back a gaze of anger. He felt that she was holding him responsible for her son's condition. But the claim of self-interest, he cynically decided, rose paramount in her over any mere human emotion, even over maternal instinct. She must control herself, or, as she had been warned, there might ensue consequences fatal to her future hopes. He saw her grip her slender hands together, bite her lip, smooth away the lines of dread from her face.

She bent in her turn over the bed.

"John!" she murmured, in the cooing tone a woman would use to a sick child.

"I daresay," thought the doctor, "that she was quite a fond and petting mother to her children, so long as they were not old enough to cross her will." But he had no time to waste over the anomalies of Lady Seneschal's character. All his energies were concentrated on the test.

The patient languidly rolled his head towards the voice, and raised those too bright eyes with a troubled question in them. The doctor caught his breath. There was not the faintest token of recognition.

"John!——" said Lady Seneschal again.

She was capable, thought Caldwell, of standing there and repeating "John" till nightfall.

The wounded man, after fixing her, with a frowning effort of memory, said, wearily yet with a certain sat-

isfaction, as if fatiguing conjecture could at least rest on this point:

"Yes, I am John."

"And I am mother. Don't you know me, John—don't you know me, John?"

But Dr. Caldwell came swiftly round. His hand was on her arm.

"Lady Seneschal, you must come away. It is no good."

"Seneschal is dead," the words came loudly and distinctly from the bed. "I buried him."

"We won't go back to that now," said the doctor. "We want you to forget all that."

As he drew the mother away, he felt that she was trembling from head to foot; and he was not surprised when, the moment the door was closed, she burst into tears.

"You're going to let him die after all! What's the good of telling me he's better when I see he's dying?"

She was quivering on the verge of an hysterical outburst; but at his fiercely whispered, "Hush!" she cowered, stifled her sobs behind her filmy handkerchief and stamping her foot, rushed past him down the stairs. In the hall he caught up to her.

"Lady Seneschal, stop! On my word of honor, your son is going to recover—certainly physical health."

She turned the drowned blue of her eyes upon him. They gleamed, he thought, as with an odd greed.

"You say he'll recover. You promise me that?"

"I promise you that; at least in the body. As to the mind——"

"Oh, pooh!" cried she, lightly, dabbing her eyes and pulling her veil with practiced little touches—"that's nothing, that's nothing. Poor dear boy, we'll soon get

him out of that! I shan't worry. It'll all come right —once we get him home—home——"

She was still repeating the word, as she stepped into the taxi.

Dr. Caldwell went back into his study, pondering. The son had not recognized his mother; that was an unexpected twist in the shaken mentality. His patient's rooted conviction however, being that he was dead, dead and buried, Dr. Caldwell knew enough of the tricks which a sick brain will play to realize that the delusion had here only taken one of those freakish turnings which are born of perverted reasoning. The voice of natural affection had been silent; this was a disappointment, yet not inexplicable. From what he had seen of Lady Seneschal, from what she had glibly revealed of the past, this younger son had always been treated hardly at home; little loved. The boy's heart cried for home—but not for his parents. And, having seen the mother, Caldwell understood why, in the son's wanderings, not once had her name escaped his lips; why, in this most tragic meeting, no least chord had vibrated between them.

Dr. Caldwell was not of the class of practitioners who take a vital personal interest in all their patients. He was essentially an intellectual man; and his profession interested his brains rather than his feelings. Success was to him scientific triumph; failure the inevitable incident. But he was curiously preoccupied with the case of Captain John Seneschal. To his surprise, he found himself, now, actually worrying over the difficulties of the situation. Might not the advantages of the return home of which he built so many dreams, be more than counterbalanced by the constant company of Lady Sen-

eschal, that irritating, irresponsible personality which even to himself had been, after the first pleasing impression, ruffling out of all proportion; which, indeed, had something in it of the relentless persistency of the buzzing fly?

He went ponderingly through the morning routine, was short with his subordinates, unusually off-hand with his convalescents. The afternoon, however, was destined to provide him with an unexpected solution to his doubts.

"If you please, Dr. Caldwell," said the V.A.D. whose rôle it was to attend to the hall door, looking in upon him as, solitary, he sat to a belated cup of tea in his den, "there's some one wants to see Captain Seneschal."

The girl's naturally pert face looked a trifle scared; for scarcely an hour ago the doctor had (as she herself expressed it) come down on her like a hundred of bricks for smoking a cigarette in the wards. Dr. Caldwell being youngish, rather handsome, extremely taciturn and unapproachable, and reputed the possessor of almost diabolic skill and daring, was naturally the adored of the V.A.D.'s; otherwise, as a daughter of the century, she would have been as impervious to rebuke as any guttersnipe.

The object of her admiration frowned heavily upon her.

"Don't you know it is after hours? What's the good of coming to me?" Then inconsequently, frowning still more: "Who is it?" he asked sharply. "Lady Seneschal?"

"Oh, dear no!" cried the girl. "This one is quite young." Miss Pamela drew the point of her shoe along the carpet, and looked down at her foot as if suddenly concerned with its appearance. "She's rawther pretty,"

she added, "and she wants—awfully—to see Captain Seneschal."

"Well, she can't," snapped Captain Seneschal's medical attendant.

For some curious feminine reason, the decision was gratifying to the V.A.D. who withdrew promptly to deliver it. Not so promptly, however, but that a shout recalled her.

"I've changed my mind. Show the lady in here."

"Right-o."

She shut the door with a just perceptible bang, and walked off, the petulant tap of her high heels resounding down the flagged hall. Reappearing, she announced, with the air of a stage parlor maid:

"Miss Amber," and again retired.

Dr. Caldwell had taken up his position with his back to the fireplace. He looked keenly as the visitor entered. His interest here was entirely from the point of view of his case; but, as he looked, he was conscious that the newcomer commanded interest in her own right.

"Rawther pretty," the V.A.D. had said from pouting lips. He did not agree. He found nothing at all to which the belittling adjective could apply. Like Miss Pamela Vibart, Miss Amber was eminently modern, but, in their modernities, there was the difference which lies between the April breeze and the atmosphere of a jazz ballroom.

He took her measure in that first glance; a girl who moved as freely as a boy, who probably had been brought up as freely as a boy, and who, never having been taught to feel the trammels of her sex, knew of no reason why she should not tramp the moors and brave the weather, ride, shoot, play games, endure and enjoy, as well as a

brother. No tottering on high heels here. No paint on that clear skin, overlaid by the golden warmth which only fresh air and sunshine can give. To some men, the whole figure might have seemed too like that of a boy, in its flat-backed, loose-limbed, rather careless ease; but to his professional eyes it was a singularly satisfactory spectacle. As firm and as healthy as a young athlete! One good result at least of feminine emancipation, thought he.

She stood, looking at him, her chin held high. Not pretty? No, but how infinitely better than pretty! A thousand faults were to be found in that round, richly colored face; too short a nose, too wide a mouth, too broad across the cheek bones, eyes a little tilted at the corners, but what lustrous eyes, how full of thought and life, and determination!

"I want to see Captain Seneschal, if you please."

As she stood before him she had not the least awkwardness. He was sure that she must have served, in some stirring capacity or other, during the war; that she knew how to take orders, and give them. She meant to give one now.

"It's against the rules," said Dr. Caldwell; "Captain Seneschal has already had one visitor to-day. Had you not better wait till to-morrow?"

She seemed to consider this for a moment, and then said:

"No."

He whose chief quarrel with the world was that its inhabitants were so outrageously talkative, as a rule, that, unless you could afford to be a complete brute you were forced to listen and to talk yourself, was amazingly tickled by this monosyllable.

"His mother was here, this morning."

She bowed her head, intimating that she was aware of the fact.

"You have been informed of his condition?"

"Yes."

"He did not recognize Lady Seneschal."

"So she told me."

"I am not at all of the opinion that these visits are to be encouraged for the present. It sets him trying to remember, and that's bad for him—I beg your pardon, won't you sit down, Miss Amber?"

She sat down, folding her hands in their doeskin gloves on her heather-colored lap. He noticed now that she was clad as for the country; and that the well-cut tweed had seen good service.

"Let me explain," he said, sitting in his turn and leaning across to her, his elbow on the table, making now and then as he spoke an apt gesture with his limber, surgeon hands. "Captain Seneschal received a bullet wound in the head, somewhere in that diabolic desert land over there in Anatolia, after, we do not know what hardships, long wanderings, privations! It is probable he preferred death to recapture. His nerve was pretty well worn out, I take it, when he was knocked over. He thought he was killed—that's how I've pieced it all out; he was badly hit and, falling, gave himself up to death. The wound itself, so far as I can diagnose it, has not injured the brain, but the nerves, the whole thinking part of him is stamped with the impression—death—the last impression before unconsciousness. An unconsciousness that persisted, I have no doubt of it, weeks, and produced the further delusion that he is not only dead but buried. He cannot rid himself of that tremendous stamp, that punch

one might say, on his mentality. He has not the strength to throw it off yet, for one thing. Memory has only returned in part. He's confused and worried: 'John Seneschal is dead, dead and buried—who am I?'—There, in a phrase, is his condition.—Now, I want him to come back to himself without shock. I don't want him started on working that brain. I want that brain to rest. It was difficult to refuse to allow his mother to see him. She had a right to do so; and moreover it was an experiment. It was most unsuccessful. The nurse tells me he's been restless and struggling to put things together—quite vainly—all day since. I hope, though I talk about rules and all that, you don't think me a curmudgeon, that you have understood why——"

He was smiling on her; a very rare relaxation of that lined, impatient face, but the smile faded as he broke off. This silent girl had a manner of speech all her own; her eyes talked, while the red mouth was close folded. Those eyes were speaking a great deal, now, of unaltered purpose, of patient determination, of deep-enkindled ardor; now and again, of fear.

"Don't you agree with me?" he asked abruptly after that awkward break.

"No."

He laughed; got up and went back to the fireplace. The color deepened on the girl's round apricot-tinted cheek; and passion cried out at him from the steady gaze.

"I know it is right that I should see him."

For an appreciable space the two fixed each other.

"Come along, then," said the doctor. "I daresay you've a better right than any one else."

"Yes," she answered.

She had a voice that was warm as her coloring, somewhat deep-toned. An agreeable voice. Dr. Caldwell found himself wishing that she were not so miserly of it. He contrasted her reserve with the inept chatter of the morning's visitor; the repose in vigor which seemed this girl's characteristic, with the neurotic restlessness of John Seneschal's mother. He owned to a considerable amount of curiosity as to the result of the new experiment; but all experiments must be more or less of a toss-up! And, as he regarded the matter, no doctor was worth the name who was not ready to face hazard for his patient.

He took the stairs at a rush, after his fashion, Miss Amber close upon his heels. Both were panting when they reached that third floor allotted to the secluded cases. Making a sign to her that she was to wait, he tapped at a door which was instantly opened. A nurse emerged. Her elderly sallow face looked troubled by the light of the unshaded electric globe hanging just above their heads.

"Oh, Dr. Caldwell," she said, under her breath, "not another visitor, surely! I have had to give him the sedative. It has been such a bad afternoon."

He imposed silence with a flap of his hand, and stood, head bent, hearkening at the half-open door. A hoarse, low, monotonous voice sounded from within the room. In a moment the doctor looked across at Miss Amber and beckoned.

"Don't speak. Don't move," he whispered as she came up to him. "Listen."

"One, two, three—four, five. Now again. One, two three, four, five. That's done it, old man. We'll be there in a jiffy. Just half a mo' till I get a better grip

of your old bones. Now—one, two, three, four, five—splendid! Oh, come! Hold up, chappie, hold up! I'll count again and that'll help us along. One, two, three—What blanked nonsense!—Not a bit of it! You're not going to turn up your toes in this Hell's pitch. Not you! Haven't I promised?—Ain't I planked my bottom dollar on it? I'll take you home myself. Yes, home to England. Yes, Thornbarrow! 'Course; settled thing, that. To Thornbarrow with me, every foot of the way. Come, we've gone a good bit already. Two hundred miles, what? Think of Thornbarrow now. Let us talk of Thornbarrow. Thornbarrow, with the sun just coming up, and the mere lying so cool in the ring of green; the trees mirrored in the water.—Not a ripple. Just a faint yellow light creeping. The cool, the peace!"

The trailing, husky accents had curiously and suddenly altered over the word, Thornbarrow, as if it had been balm on torment. Dr. Caldwell laid a compelling touch on Miss Amber's gloved hand. His eyes were bright and angry under a vexed drawing of the brows.

"You hear," he whispered, "the result of to-day's visit. Tut! it's the first time he's got back to the bad days, to the struggle and hardship—he was the only one left out of four, you know. I don't like it. You must give it up for to-day, Miss Amber. I couldn't——"

She looked at him without speaking; but the fire in that look silenced him. It scattered his professional caution; it mocked his pride of silence; it made nothing of his long experience. It placed him somewhere in a remote ignorance, a mere blundering male, altogether outside the unerring discernment of a woman's heart!

She left him on the threshold and went deliberately into the room. He followed at a little distance, acutely

interested, and lifted the screen from the electric light. He did not want to miss a single fluctuation on his patient's countenance.

She drew the bedside chair close to the pillow, sat down, slipped her left arm under the restlessly moving head, and took both the wandering hands into her strong right clasp. Her face was very close to the sick man's.

The doctor bent forward to watch. Ah, here was recognition at last—light on the drawn distressed features; rapturous fixing of the tormented, searching eyes; a wondering smile!

"Margaret!"

"Yes, your Margaret."

Dr. Caldwell had liked that voice of hers already; it held the noblest love-music now.

"John Seneschal's Margaret——"

"John Seneschal's Margaret."

She repeated the strange greeting, as with full comprehension; and shifted him, so that he rested in her arms. For a little while there was so complete a stillness that it did not seem as if there were even breathing in the room. Then the patient started and strove to release himself, muttering—there was something he had to say, something he must say—oh, what was it?

Margaret Amber laid him back on his pillows with a deftness that betrayed considerable experience and leant over him.

"Don't speak—don't say anything. I understand. I know all you want to say. Who should know, but I? You are not to think, you are not to worry. You are to get better, you are to get well. In a little while you are coming to Thornbarrow. I will not let you talk of

anything till we are at Thornbarrow together—yes, we shall soon be together at Thornbarrow."

The terrible, impotent fret of his mind gave way under her words, as the turmoil of waters under a flood of oil. He murmured "Margaret," closed his eyes, smiled faintly, and then, speaking to himself, said, twice over, that she was beautiful.

Margaret Amber stood gazing down at the growing placidity of the face; then:

"Good-night, John," said she; kissed the forehead just below the bandages and walked out of the room.

The soldier lay with closed eyes, his features placid, the smile still lingering on his lips. It was the face of a man lost in a happy dream.

CHAPTER III

THE AMBERS OF VALE ROYAL

YOU never do nothing what I ask," said Lady Amber. She still spoke the incomplete English of the fascinating Spanish-American who had swept a taciturn, hard-headed money-maker off his feet thirty years ago, at Valparaiso.

David Amber had been a comparatively young man then, though he would not see thirty-five again; a life of toil and the concentration of a single purpose had aged him. He had started as office boy in the firm of Thomas, Paterson & Killick, contractors and shipowners, Glasgow; had risen through rapid stages to be clerk, traveler, confidential agent and representative partner. This was to be the last voyage he would take as subordinate. On his return home Thomas, Paterson & Killick would become but names in the concern, and Amber alone reign supreme over a business that was beginning to rank among the commercial powers of the world.

Carmel had sprung of a race as old as Spain itself; but the pride of a long line of hidalgos had been worn by considerable friction with an every-day world by a slow disintegration into poverty and overlaid by the dust from the chariot wheels of the more fortunate. Don Atanasio had the manner of the Duke who had been his twentieth ascendant and the habit of mind of the old cadger fate had made him.

When he had bidden his wife send Carmel with refresh-

ment to the stranger in the middle of a business discussion, he had not been without some idea that the sight of such a flower of loveliness might have an effect upon one who threatened to drive a hard bargain. He had not been prepared for the completeness of the success. A man whose sole romance up to this had been that of brilliant and daring commercial adventure, Amber saw and was conquered in a single look.

Carmel, just seventeen, rich bloomed as the pomegranate blossom, velvet of cheek, slender and round of limb, with the grace of a kitten, hair black as night and eyes passionate and innocent, dark and deep and full of unutterable mysterious things—Carmel, all perfumed with the fragrance of youth, stood before him, holding out a tray, half smiling, half taunting, altogether adorable. The hard Northerner, the man of steel and iron, of shares and stocks, capitulated without a struggle. She broke upon his life and filled it with throbbing color, as the rare aurora borealis breaks upon his native sky.

David Amber always got what he wanted; he got it now. This indeed without more difficulty than was stimulating, for the hidalgo's objections all melted into terms of dollars, and Carmel herself, young eyes dazzled by the jewels and rich stuffs her lover showered upon her, young ears more pleased perhaps by the chink of gold than by his slow, difficult words of ardor, was as willing to accept the new existence as the kitten she resembled is to lick cream.

Kittens outgrow all too soon their hour of entrancing grace; and the Spanish girl swiftly developed into the Spanish matron. David Amber had long gone back to the allurements of fortune-building as he sat, this morning of late April, in the elaborate breakfast parlor of

Vale Royal and heard his wife complain with a petulance that had once been to him as the bubble of champagne, that he "never did nothing what she asked." He was a small, spare man, iron-hued of hair and complexion; iron of strength, physical and moral. He was of those who speak very little and act without ceasing.

In Lady Amber's eyes he had come to mean the money-making machine, the provider of all that made life worth living, the social standing, the luxuries, the nameless extravagance of an ultra-fashionable woman.

She never quite forgave her husband for the fact that after the birth of their only child, Margaret, a settled embonpoint had replaced the exquisite outline of her teens. Now, not all the cosmetics in the world, not all the genius of the first designers of the mode, could hide the fact that she was obese almost to grotesqueness. And it may be said that her grievance against her husband had grown with her avoirdupois till she regarded herself in the light of a martyr to matrimony.

On the other hand, if his wonderful love-glamour had passed as quickly as the warm scented night in which he had first seen her, David Amber had consecrated all the gratitude of which a profound and manly nature was capable to his wife on the very score of that maternity. Let her be as unreasonable, as vapid, as prodigal, as thankless as she chose—she had given him Margaret, and everything must be condoned to her for that single priceless boon.

Margaret was the joy of her father's eyes; she made the sole music in his silent life. On her were concentrated the reserves of feeling of an intensely passionate nature that had not been able to expend itself. He had come even to be glad of Lady Amber's incapacity, of that ex-

istence steeped in indolence and self-indulgence which had kept her from occupying herself about her child. Margaret had grown up untouched by the maternal influence; free as a fawn, fresh as a mountain stream. Next to her sacrificed health, her daughter's extraordinary tastes and customs were Lady Amber's chief subject of lament. But her power ended there; Margaret and her father went their different way in complete sympathy with each other.

This morning Lady Amber had actually dragged herself from her pillows and come, trailing the white velvet and ermines of her opulent morning wrapper, into the breakfast room to interview her husband before his departure to town. For once, she was determined to make herself heard on the subject of Margaret.

"How is it possible," she went on in excited tones, as Lord Amber gave no answer to the general accusation, "that you can sit there, and look at me, and—oh, my God!—let your only daughter, our child, our unique child, fling her beautiful life away? She, who might have everything—her choice of the greatest in the land, to—to—" Lady Amber gulped, her cheeks shook—"to think of marrying a *matto*, a madman!"

"Don't cry, Carmel," said her husband kindly. "There can be no question of marriage yet."

Lady Amber dabbed her eyes with her fingers, those eyes which had once been so overwhelmingly large and darkly lustrous in the little face; which were now lost in a sea of cherubic cheek, and said excitedly:

"David, what fool you are! You give that girl her head all her life, and now she bolt. No question of marriage! How easy you go on. I tell you, last night, when she come back from that hospital of misfortune, I say to her: 'What is the good of this, my child, you cannot

marry him now!' And she say to me: 'I mean to marry him.' Just like that. That is how you have brought my daughter up. And I say to her—oh, I tell you I near swoon, Amber, the horror!—'God of Mercy, how can you marry a madman?' And she say: 'Not mad, and I marry him soon as I can.' "

Lord Amber turned his chair sideways so that he might not see the distortion of anger in his wife's countenance. It was his way to avoid, as much as possible, looking at her when she was angry. He slowly stirred his tea, and his grave features became set into melancholy. She began to sob violently.

"But, Carmela, do not agitate yourself. The boy may recover. I understand there is every hope——" He broke off. Lady Amber's emotion was becoming convulsive.

"What can I do?" he exclaimed, despairingly.

"Do? You can forbid. You are the father. You have the money. Do? *Dios!* I have no patience——"

"Carmela, do you think that if—the idea is ludicrous, but it is yours—if I were to threaten to disinherit my only child, it would have any effect?"

"Ah, but you are fool," cried Lady Amber, "it would have effect on Lady Seneschal."

She stopped abruptly.

He was looking at her steadily. It always frightened her when he looked at her like that, she could not have told why, since he had never said a harsh thing, much less done one to her, in their joint lives. She fell back helpless, resentful, sobbing, pushing the half-finished cup of chocolate away with a childish gesture.

"Come, Carmela, and be reasonable," said Lord Amber in Spanish; speaking indeed as if to a child. "Margaret is nearly twenty-seven; she has loved this boy all her life,

and only him. She is full of good sense; we ought to trust her in this matter; give her time to see for herself. I do not think she will do anything sentimentally rash."

Lady Amber, hunting frantically for her pocket handkerchief and failing to find it, covered her face with the coroneted breakfast napkin, while with her free hand she sought blindly for the electric button ambushed in the woodwork of the table. Inarticulate phrases dropped from behind the napkin.

In plain words, Amber did not mean to interfere—he would see their child commit suicide, and not lift a finger! Margaret sensible? Margaret do nothing rash? She was the most obstinate, headstrong—she was her father's own daughter! He had brought her up in disrespect and disregard of her mother. (That dirty slut of a maid was not worth her wages; to let her mistress come down without a handkerchief; it was infamous, disgraceful, not to be borne. Where, in the name of God, was the bell? Those insolent footmen had turned the table the wrong way again. It was done on purpose!) If Amber had the feelings of a man, he would sack the lot—he would ring the bell himself—he would, if he had not a heart of stone, call her maid; get her a handkerchief, smelling salts. Margaret was her only child! Who would be a mother to have her heart broken?

Before Lord Amber could rise from his seat, the door opened, and Margaret entered. She stood for a second, looking from one to the other; her eyebrows went up in a mute question which as mutely Lord Amber answered with a faint resigned arching of his own brows, accompanied by that compression of the lips which spelt—how often she had read it!—the patience of long habit.

Lady Amber tore the napkin from her face and exposed

that large surface, quivering like a jelly. Her lace mantilla had nearly fallen from her head, and with her hair drawn in tight curl-papers, and the grimace of her mouth pulled down at the corners, she looked like a huge crying baby.

Margaret went over to her. Never could there have been a greater contrast; the girl, trim and straight-limbed, slender as an adolescent youth, in her workmanlike serge skirt and blue-and-white jumper, her glossy chestnut head and her young column of white throat, seemed so extravagantly unlike the obese, untidy Spaniard that no one could have imagined them mother and daughter. She drew the lace over the exposed head, found the missing pocket handkerchief, and wiped the streaming eyes with a couple of deft dabs.

"Now Mamma, now Mamma, your chocolate's getting cold."

"Ah, all very well, Margaret, you break my heart, and your father is brute to me."

"Dear Mamma, you mustn't cry over the white velvet; you'll mark it. And it's so lovely, isn't it, father? It's the first time I've seen it; I must say I call it scrumptious. But you ought to have taken your curl-papers out."

"Ah, you naughty girl! You think, you think you can turn me with coaxes and chocolate—look at her, Amber, what she like?"

Lord Amber's glance caressed his daughter. The girl shook up the cushion at the back of her mother's chair, poured out a fresh cup of chocolate from the silver pot bubbling on the spirit lamp, and put a *brioche* on her mother's plate, declaring they were still hot and must be scrumptious. And then she sat down herself and asked her father for a cup of tea.

Lady Amber had now fallen from the tornado stage to one of moaning pathos.

"To think that it is to end like this! Ah, who would be mother! For God's sake, Margaret, why is it always toast and butter, toast and butter, with you? And that dry bit bacon! How will you ever hope for a figure, my poor child? Ah, you think you please me with compliments, but you never really want to please me. Would God I could see you dress like a lady! *Dios!* My daughter rather dress like a coal-heaver. And your father smile!"

"I think Margaret looks very well."

This moderate paternal encomium almost produced a new explosion.

"She look very well. She do very well. It is to make one jump from one's skin; and when she marry a mad soldier, it will still be—very well."

"Oh, that's what it's about, is it?" said Margaret. She stared down at her plate for one moment; the morning radiance of her face suddenly overcast with gravity. Then she added, as if to herself: "Poor Mamma!"

Not the most strenuous protestation could have nailed her purpose more relentlessly before her parents than those two softly spoken words. Lord Amber gave her a quick, scrutinizing glance, then sighed. Lady Amber was maundering on:

"All my hope, all my ambitions! My girl, who could marry any one! Mother of God! Any title!"

"But I shall have a title, Mamma."

"Ah, *pouf!* you cheek me? What is that? A what you call it?—meazly baronet!"

"The oldest stock in the county—and Thornbarrow," said Lord Amber.

"Don't, Father!" said Margaret with a quick frown, and a sudden reproachful flash of brilliant eyes. "As if that mattered—you can't compute John and me in terms like that! You know we'd have been married long ago, if we'd had our way."

"Well, my dear," said the financier, "if you'd like to come with me as far as the station, it might be well if we had a little talk."

"I'll drive you, Dad!" cried Margaret, jumping up; and, as Lady Amber moaned protest, she cried gayly from the threshold that she would not drive into the ditch, and she had had quite enough breakfast, thank you; and she really did think it was more comfortable not to be fat, dear Mamma; that she might, perhaps, find the box from Reville & Rossiter waiting at the station, and bring it back; and would not that be thrilling?

"Your mother is very unhappy," said Lord Amber in a low voice, as Margaret joined him, flinging herself into her fur coat and brandishing her gloves.

She did not answer. Striding out through the Tudor porch, she turned the chauffeur from his perch by a gesture and sprang into a vacated seat. Her father, with the air of one wrapt in meditation, slowly took his place beside her. As the chauffeur, touching his cap, fell back, she paused, her hand on the wheel. "Get in, Durand," she called. "I shall want you to drive the car home." Then, as she started the machine—one with every latest contrivance, marvelously easy of management—she said, looking her father straight in the eyes: "I mean to be dropped at the Chase, when I've seen you off."

The car was diving down the long, straight avenue, running as on velvet. Lord Amber watched his daughter's capable gloved hands, mechanically, proudly aware

of the undeviating line of their swift advance; while, at the same time, almost agonizedly concentrating upon what he knew was a decisive moment in both their lives. He had always taken Margaret's part against the peevish mother, since she was a very little child. But, this morning, while he still championed the daughter, out of his unalterable loyalty, his heart was all on his wife's side—his girl to marry a broken soldier! His bright, splendid Margaret, to link her youth to disability; to shoulder, in the generosity of her faithfulness, a burden which might well end by crushing all joy from her existence!

He did not speak until they had swung out through the great eagle-topped pillars that guarded the entrance to Vale Royal, into the main road. Then he said, in a tentative voice:

"Have you thought this over well, Peggy?" It was only in rare moments of emotion that he called her by the old childish pet name. Ordinary words of endearment never passed between them; scarcely ever caresses; their strong affection showed itself only now and again by a look, a quiet deed.

The father's devotion, as nearly all parental devotion must be, was built on sacrifice, on constant self-effacement, on abnegation; the daughter's on gratitude and clear-sighted recognition. There was complete confidence between them. In other words, he not only let his daughter go her own way, but gave her every facility to do so. And she, taking her independence to the full, proved herself worthy of his trust.

Now for the first time he passionately desired to prevent her from carrying out her will; for the first time he wanted her to abandon something on which she had set her heart.

Margaret sat, without turning her charming irregular profile by as much as a fraction to show that she had heard. But his eyes, anxiously fixed upon her, saw an indescribable hardening pass over her features. He drew a long breath through his nostrils like a man in pain, and added almost humbly:

"I mean—it's a tremendous decision. Don't be in a hurry. Take time."

Miss Amber deftly curved round a cart, avoided a puddle and hooted to two infants, half a furlong ahead. Then she doubled speed up an empty incline, and gave her father the full vision of her face. She was, for her, rather pale; her eyes blazed. Her lips quivered, well-nigh imperceptibly, but the father saw it.

"Isn't eight years time enough?" she asked, harshly.

"Eight years? My poor child, we're at cross purposes. It is not a question of the past, but of the present; of John Seneschal's actual condition."

"Oh, father, we are at cross purposes indeed! If you can think that anything but an added reason for me; if you can think that when John wants me a thousand times more than ever he did——"

She set her teeth on her under-lip—its trembling cut him to the heart—and with abrupt movements began to change the gear. The hitherto noiseless car groaned and churned. The father had an odd feeling as if his heart were caught in that striving machinery. Suddenly Margaret turned towards him again.

"Father," she said, "you can make me very unhappy, but even you cannot come between John and me. What kind of love would it be, if anything could?"

The last words were scarcely audible. He had not for one moment cherished the illusion that he had power to

alter her decision. He had been aiming only at a respite. Now he knew himself utterly beaten before he had even been able to make clear his point, much less argue it. Presently she delivered herself into his melancholy silence.

"I am going to stay at Thornbarrow when John arrives there. I am going to be with him all the time. I will marry him at the very first moment it is possible, so that I can nurse him entirely myself. No, father, don't speak, don't say a word! Oh, it's just because of what might happen! If he were to die, if he were to go quite mad, at least I should have been able to give him—oh, if it were only a few poor weeks, it would be something, after all the years that have been and for all the years to come!"

"That's how you feel?" said Lord Amber, after a long pause.

"That's how I feel," answered Margaret. Then the harsh note dropping from her voice, she cried suddenly and piteously:

"Oh, Dad——!"

"Don't say another word, my girl."

The straggling outskirts of the little country town were springing up about them. A row of seventeenth century almshouses, followed by a hideous rank of red-brick and blue-slate villadom; here were the high-lying churchyard and the avenue of great elms; a sudden turn of the road, an abrupt downward dip, and midway the station, inconveniently planted on the slope.

Lord Amber had something to say to his daughter before they parted; but he found it difficult to express. He cleared his throat, opened his mouth to speak two or three times, and was dumb. At last he began slowly and haltingly:

"Don't think that I haven't got something left in me,

after all my hard life, that doesn't understand you. You've chosen—you're ready—you found——" He rejected all these phrases, looked at her as she brought the car to a standstill, with what tried to be a smile and eyes haggard with anxious love.

"You always understand," said Margaret; pulled off her loose driving gloves and caught his hand. He held hers tightly a moment, and then got out of the car. He hated being seen off from the platform, so she made no attempt to follow him. Watching him toil up the steep stairway, she thought with a pang that for the first time he looked like an old man.

As he sat in the window corner of his carriage, Lord Amber closed his eyes on the flying panorama that was so familiar to him. He had passed through two successive phases of feeling during the war years. The first had been poignant regret that he had no son to fight for his country; then had come a profound, egotistical joy that he could not be robbed like so many of his neighbors. Now he told himself that, after all, the war had got him. He would have to give his best, his dearest, his all. But he knew, too, that he was as proud of his daughter that day as any father could be of his soldier son.

CHAPTER IV

HAUNTED THORNBARROW

THE old Tudor house stood in the center of the Chase with all the air of belonging as much to the wild down lands as the gray bowlders and the twisted thorn trees that sprang out of them. One of those rare high buildings with flattened gable-wings at either end, left untouched by the hand of the improver in its original bareness and austerity, it showed a stern gray front to the winds that never ceased beating about the wild spaces, even in the hottest summer days. Yet it had a kindly look about it, too, like the face of an old man who knows too much not to be tolerant.

There was mystery in the place. Whether rising from the strange Barrows which linked it back to prehistoric times, to lost races beyond the knowledge of present man; or, yet again, merely produced by the physical character of the country—so barren, so tossed, so harsh in rocky texture under the fine turf; dipping into such sinister hollows where the packed dwarf hazel always held black depths of shadow, blackest of all in the sunshine—or by writhen shapes of squat thorns standing singly or in straggling groups; whether it was the something untamably apart here in nature itself that formed the spell, it were hard to say. But one thing was certain—even the casual visitor would feel it. It laid hold of the spirit, gripped, not cruelly but potently. Withal it was

deeply English—pagan, if you will, but English to the marrow of its mighty skeleton of chalk.

Margaret Amber had felt the singular atmosphere of Thornbarrow long before she could analyze any sensation. Thornbarrow and Vale Royal were contiguous estates. She had been as much at home in the old gray dwelling as in the tremendous restored pile of her father's home where antiquity had fought a losing battle against money, and succumbed. As a child, the Lord only knew what fancies had visited her in the Chase; what she had seen, or dreamed she saw. But she had always loved it.

This April morning she drew a breath of relief to find herself inside the gates of Thornbarrow. She paused to taste the sensation. . . . Oh, no wonder he had cried out for it, her poor wandering boy—tramping the awful desert, the burning rocks, the waterless waste, supporting his flagging comrade, spurring himself and the others with the piteous cheat of counting steps: "One, two, three, four, five . . .!"

Margaret, remembering those ravings, thought that each number had fallen upon her heart like a hammer stroke, leaving a bruise. . . . How he had suffered! She set her small white teeth and fiercely drove the point of her walking-stick into the turf. How, always, he had been made to suffer! How vile even his own had been to him! Torn from the two profound affections of his life—Thornbarrow and Margaret—for no reason valid before truth and humanity, for the mere satisfaction of Lady Seneschal's favoritism and her paltry ambitions.

John and she had been children together. Everything in each that was fine or delicate in thought and feeling fitted with some need of the other's soul. She could not remember any shock of discovery in her love for John,

nor having ever promised in set words to marry him; their claim upon each other had grown with their growth. They had been playfellows first, then comrades, then lovers—each stage gathering and merging into the next without losing any of its special treasures.

Yet Margaret had always known, and was not jealous, that Thornbarrow came first with John. The roots struck deep into the soil and fed the tree, and gave it its life, while the branches spread to breeze and sunshine. . . . It was Thornbarrow first.

Slowly she walked, following a track in the closer herbage, a short cut, every step of the undulating way was familiar to her tread. . . . Eight years ago! She had been only eighteen. At eighteen what can one do? She had made the best fight she could. Her parents she could have managed, even her mother—and Sir Edward, had he been left to his own sense of fair play. But Lady Seneschal! There was a part of Margaret's soul that still shuddered at the remembrance of those two scenes she had had with John's mother, when she had striven to obtain reprieve, respite, from that intolerable sentence of exile. . . . To send John to India! unbelievable decree! . . . The look on his boyish face when he had told her!

"I'd rather they dug me a grave in that old Barrow!" It had been no youthful hyperbole; she knew it was true. At first it had been all a horrible enigma to the two bewildered young creatures; the why of it so nightmare dark to both; the agony so purposeless; so gratuitous the cruelty! Yet when the reason dawned it had been still worse for them; torture added to doom. They were too fond of each other and Lady Seneschal had decided they were not to be that. . . . Lady Seneschal, self-

appointed disposer of their lives, their souls and consciences and pulsing hearts, willed otherwise.

Margaret was to be for Edward. The Amber heiress was a plum reserved for the first-born of the Seneschals and for none else. The woman had had no shame in her infamous scheming. Margaret recalled the very words in which she had blazoned her intentions. So imperturbable, too, smiling and coaxing the future daughter-in-law! "Dear little girl, dear little girl, you'll be grateful to me, one of these days. Absurd marriage for you, with your expectations! Childish nonsense, nothing but childish nonsense! The parents' duty, dear little girl! You'll thank me, one of these days. I say you'll thank me one of these days."

"And John—will he thank you?"

Margaret's lips grew white, even now, as she remembered the convulsion of rage with which she had uttered the words. She could have screamed. She could have struck. Thinking back on it, she believed that she could have killed Lady Seneschal for the smile with which she had answered her:

"John?—John must not stand in his brother's light. You must allow me to judge for John, third son. A third son—a third son. He must make his own way. The third for the army—it's been the Seneschal tradition for generations. My dear little girl, you'll be telling me next that John ought to be the eldest. The third son, he must find his own level!"

How could eighteen-year-old Margaret make this mother see that it was not his own, but another's, level, John was to be forced to take? How argue with a mind that defied reason, with a heart impervious to compassion, against a will incapable of remorse?

"I could do it now, though," thought the girl. "And whatever happens, he shall be made to suffer no more. I'll see to that—'John Seneschal's Margaret'—Oh, my boy!"

She quickened her steps; too well she knew the grip of that old agony. It had first leaped upon her when the news of Kut came through; a profitless, rending pain, physical in its intensity. She must slam the door upon it and draw the bolt. A mere source of weakness, and by the mercy of God, no longer justified. All should be made smooth for him now; she had the power. How he had looked at her! What a light had come to his poor face! How gently he had fallen to rest; to rest upon her strength even as she spoke!

She mounted the rise and stood still. The April green of the grass on the Downs had the translucent tint of chrysoprase in the morning sunshine. The great belt of oak woods, just breaking into leaf, showed like new bronze against the purple distance. Even the hollows, choked with the stunted hazels, had lost their dark, sinister air as she looked down on them and only added another tone of spring verdure. Gorse flamed here and there; and here and there the black thorn still broke white. Next month the hawthorns would stand sheeted with blossom, losing, for one brief span, their air of wizened gnome-like eld, of being squat twisted trees to shadow the gambols of some squat, twisted race.

Margaret knew that folk said the Downs were still haunted by a pigmy tribe; that, at sunrise, or sundown, or by a mystic aspect of the moon, you could still see quaint companies of skin-clad, dwarfish creatures, scurrying into the hollows, much as now a line of white-tailed rabbits dived into their burrows.

She and John had watched for them, many a day. She wondered, now, if she had really ever seen them, as she so circumstantially then believed. This April forenoon all the mystery seemed to emanate from the great Barrows that lay basking in majestic self-containment, holding their secret of fierce life and tragic death inviolate through untold centuries. Little Margaret and John had once felt as if they shared the Barrow secrets; as if they had been admitted into comradeship with the spirit of the place, with the chieftains who lay under the sod surrounded by their dead warriors in battle array. She who had thirsted and hungered, she who had agonized with him through Kut and the rest, would soon have joy with him in his great rediscovery of his own! She would see Thornbarrow take him to its bosom again—and not be jealous. Side by side they would sit again on the greatest of the old Barrows, in perfect silence, and the wild peace, the freedom, the freshness, the spaces, the illimitable sky would sink into, possess him, as of yore, and the old rolling stretch of earth would have her child again. . . . Mud flats of Mesopotamia, roaring bitter rivers, fierce, burning days, cruel, cold nights, monstrous inflictions of malice from man and nature, hopeless struggle, bloodshed, defeat, horror, death, death—would it not all fade into the background like the memory of some nightmare in a close room, and Thornbarrow alone be real to him?—Thornbarrow and Margaret!

Another upland to be surmounted and there, just beneath, in the wide depression, the house! As she went towards it, at a step steady as that of a marching soldier, she fancied there was a new consciousness about the gray pile; an expectant air, as if it knew its best son, its truest Seneschal, was returning to it.

"It is waiting," she said. "All Thornbarrow is waiting, like me!"

A bent figure in the leggings and the many-pocketed jacket of the gamekeeper, came loping across her path, as it dipped again between two sunken hazel copses. Fairy groves these had been to the children who had played there in the old days, each little round stem so closely set together that even their small bodies could scarce squeeze between them. Now that she no longer looked upon them from above, Margaret saw that, as ever, they held night embraced. Some secret they, too, had, never to be told. And here was old Roger, with the young retriever at his heels. "A varmint," Roger called it, and a varmint it looked, with its wide-open laughing jaws and small, dark, inscrutable eyes. How she and John had plagued the poor head-keeper, in days gone by, and how he had loved "Master John"!

"Good morning, Roger—I have seen him."

No need, between them, to specify whom.

"Ah, and have you, now? That be good hearing. Ah, that it be. To be sure. What a dispensation, Missie!—The last on 'em, and given back, as you mid say, out of the grave!"

He stood, gnarled and rugged himself like one of the old thorns, his face screwed into further knots by the intentness of his gaze upon her.

"There's a many gone, Missie!" he added.

"Oh, Roger, let us think now of the one that's come back."

" 'Tis well said. Ah, but I do be thinking of them. Seems to me, as I go my rounds o' nights—just same as ever, war or no war—seems to me I hear the steps of them, my three young masters, every one his own. For

it be this way, Missie: a man of my craft has the ear for sound—trained, you mid say. Bless you! I know the step of fox or stoat, or any wild thing, yards off. And every man his own step. And I do fancy I hear the three of 'em, o' nights, all three of 'em, a-tramping round with me. Ah, 'twas their great divarsion, nights out with old Roger, after the poachers. Ah, 'tis a queer telling—spirits, maybe. But, there, to think I may yet have one on 'em in his living body, going around with me again! Seems as if I could 'ardly believe it."

Margaret felt a faint shiver slide over her. "It is these horrid little copses," she thought. "We always said they were full of creepy things. Why was old Roger shaking his head and speaking so creepily, too?" She had a sudden vision of Edward and Stephen, "the Seneschal boys," who had always run in couples and looked so like each other, and despised little dark John, and Margaret, the girl. So, they went round with old Roger o' nights. Not that she minded that; she had no fear of ghosts, least of all ghosts of any she had known.

"And how mid you have found Master John, Missie? Folks do say he be turr'ble wounded. Queer in the 'ead, folks do say!"

Margaret flew a crimson pennant on each cheek.

"How dare they!—it's a lie!"

"There," said the keeper, moving on imperturbably. "I do 'low there be a deal of vulish talk. There, I'll tell 'em what 'ee do say, Missie. There, I be mortal glad to hear it.—Come along, you varmint! He be a nice-bred dog, he be. Master John will be main pleased with he. I've been a-training of him, and he do tumble to it, reg'lar, he do."

The young dog looked up, laughing with his dripping

jaws, while his curious black eyes held—you could not say whether menace or caress.

"Come along, Turk!"

"Turk!—why did you call him that?"

"Why, because he be a young Turk, Missie—just about!"

The keeper sloped away; the retriever followed, all of his wild youth compressed in discipline, and only made manifest by the irrepressible spring of each muscle under the silky sable coat. Margaret had an odd idea that the beast was mocking them. How was it possible to have called the dog Turk? If any county in England had paid a toll of life to the horrible East, surely it had been Dorset; and yet the work-a-day, earth-bound soul of it went its placid way, unmoved.

Instead of walking straight up to the house, Margaret branched off into the stableyard—the first part of a great country property to show evidence of war conditions, the last to recover. Her heart contracted as she passed the empty stalls where the boys' hunters had stood in glossy array, the loose-boxes over the possession of which there had always been a wrangle. Outside, grass was growing between the cobblestones; inside, it was one echoing void after another. Not even a stableman about; and the fat black pony at the very end looked ridiculously insignificant. In that further loose-box dwelt the old comrade she had come to visit: John's retriever, Hod. He had been as young as Turk when John had left, and after John had said good-by to him there had been damp places on his curly pate. Margaret knew, for she had found them there, and kissed them. Now Hod was very old and lay dozing on a bed of straw most of the day, unless it was very sunny; for it hurt him to move

his rheumatic joints. He lifted his gray head as Margaret came in. He was nearly blind, but he knew her by the dog sense of him. She sat down and gently hugged him. He was much more dull and broken than she had thought. And it pained her; she felt altogether saddened. John would fret over this.

"Hod," she said, "he's coming home. Your master's coming home. Do you hear that, Hod? No one has told you yet, I am sure. Wake up, Hod, and listen."

At her tone, he perked his ears a second and raised his head; but his eyes remained dim and vague. And in a moment he drooped again, laying his nose between his paws with a long, shuddering groan. Sighing, Margaret went out to the empty stableyard. She had started for Thornbarrow full of thankfulness and hope; now, on every side, shadows seemed to be gathering about her.

"Hallo!" said a light voice behind her.

She knew who it was and cried "Gabrielle!" before turning round.

The only daughter of the house, barely seventeen—for she came along way after the boys—Gabrielle Seneschal stood, poised on the cobbles, a slender figure blown by the wind. Pretty, small-boned, shallow-eyed with a nimbus of fluffy hair, blond, of a blondness akin to red. She was singularly like her mother in many ways. She had the same odd complacency, the same flickering smile, the same quick pattering speech, and if she did not fling upon the distracted hearer quite as many disjointed sentences, as many meaningless iterations, she was, nevertheless, in a fair way to similar proficiency. Bareheaded, she stood smiling, a picture of youthful gayety. As the wind caught her red-blond hair it rippled like weeds in swift waters.

"Hallo, Margaret! What are you doing here? I just ran out with a message to Jenkins—the chauffeur, you know. Fancy finding you in the stables! Though, of course, I mean to say, you like that sort of thing—better than tea-fights, I mean. Not that there's anything in the stables, now—goodness!"

"Yes, there is. There's Hod."

"Oh, my dear, Hod? My dear, you don't mean—mother was just saying the other day, he ought to be put out of the way.

"Put out of the way? John's dog!"

"John's dog? Oh, I see what you mean! Oh, my dear, after all—far the kindest thing! Put an end to his sufferings. I mean the dog's, of course. And what good would it do John to find an old dog? And it isn't as if he'd ever be any use to any one—only painful. And besides, poor John, why, he didn't even recognize mother yesterday! He's not likely to remember Hod."

She broke off with a shrill scream, for Margaret had seized her, not too gently, by the arm.

"Listen to me, Gabie. If any one lays a finger on John's dog—! Look here. I'll come over and fetch him away with me in the car, this afternoon."

"Oh, no, my dear—oh, come! You needn't do that. I'll tell mother. I'm sure if it's any pleasure to you! I'm sure if mother had the least idea—she'd only be too pleased——" Gabrielle was rubbing her arm, her hovering smile humorous over Margaret's sentimentality. "My dear, if anybody thought there'd be such a fuss over an old dog!"

"I'm going on to the house," said Margaret abruptly. "I want to see your mother."

She suffered Gabrielle's slender hand within her arm;

but that was all. "It's dreadful," she thought as she went beside the fly-away figure, "that I should hate John's relations as I do! A fuss about an old dog? Yes, that's how you would look at it! As if a faithful dog's life was not something as precious, more precious, than that of a great many human beings! But one might as well expect feeling from a bit of thistledown as from you!"

CHAPTER V

JOHN SENESCHAL'S FATHER

MARGARET thought she had never hated John's mother quite so much as on this April day which found them together in the Chinese parlor consecrated to that lady's activities.

They sat opposite each other, Lady Seneschal blandly pattering, as imperturbably pleased with herself in the shabbiness of her morning attire as she had been yesterday in the perfection of the Réville garments. She was of those with whom petty economy is a passion. It extended to-day to not wearing till lunch-time the bunch of silver curls at the back of her head, to the dingy black shawl—black does not show dirt—over the lingerie blouse which did; a blouse which had cost two hundred francs, many years ago, in Paris.

It was this very blandness of Lady Seneschal that enraged her visitor. How dared she smile like that? How dared she present that front of impervious self-complacency while on the little table, just behind her, those two clear-cut boyish faces looked out from their khaki frames? Had she forgotten the double grave in the Flanders mud? Had she forgotten the little bare room at the top of the Brock Street house and the figure on the narrow bed, the stricken face and the haunted eyes? The last son! How could she bear it with the burden of his eight years' exile on her soul?

Meanwhile Lady Seneschal was looking at the heiress,

and the light in her eyes was nothing if not affectionate.

"My dear little girl—my dear little girl. Charming of you to come, charming, charming! You want to tell me about your visit to John? I'm sure you do." The smile flickered; she looked roguish. "You went to see him? You saw him—you saw him. I'm glad I warned you. It might have been a shock. He didn't know you, poor dear boy. He did not know you—of course."

"He did know me," said Margaret slowly, her gaze passionately upbraiding the airy mother. Then she added: "Of course!"

She did not mean to be pleasant, but Lady Seneschal had not a notion of taking umbrage.

"What?—He knew you, knew you? You don't mean to say he knew you! Seeing me stimulated his brain, poor dear boy! The doctor—I don't know if he ought to be called major, or colonel, or what—but, as I said, you're safe to call a doctor, doctor. That's a way of putting it, what?—The doctor drove me away.—And so he knew you? He knew you!"

"Lady Seneschal——"

"My dear little girl——"

"John and I are engaged."

"No——" cried Lady Seneschal in the tone of greatest amazement. And then, blinking and pursing her lips. "My dear little girl, I'm not a fool. The old story. Well, I must say it's romantic. His father and I, we'll be quite pleased. To tell you the truth, we are quite pleased. His father and I talked it over last night when I came back. I'm not a fool; I saw, when I met you in Bond Street, yesterday, where the land lay. I'm not a fool, but I must say—romantic! It is romantic—after all these years!—To think of it! Any little friction—no,

no, we won't say friction. It was absurd at your age, his age. Absurd, absurd. Sir Edward and I, we had to be wise. Parents have to be wise; parents know best. But, of course, it's quite different now. Nothing could be nicer. Circumstances alter cases. I say, cases alter circumstances. That's the way to put it."

Margaret waited till the lady, sinking forward on herself, had come to an end of her breathing powers, and was, after her fashion, opening her closed eyes and drawing herself up for a fresh start. Then she said:

"I have told father myself. I wanted you to know. And now, please may I see Sir Edward?"

"My dear little girl, it's not a very good day for Sir Edward. No, it's not. He's glumpy this morning. Glumpy, glumpy—glumpy. He had a bad night. It's the complaint. As Weatherly says, 'It's the complaint, Lady Seneschal. Kidneys,' he says to me. Kidneys, you know, you've got to make the greatest allowance for kidneys. They play the deuce with the temper. The deuce, the deuce!—You know the doctor's rough way, my dear. Yes, of course, Weatherly's seen you, too, through meaze and mumples, and chicken rash and all the rest of it. You know him. But Sir Edward, he's disheartened. He thought I'd have brought a better account of John. Of course I've had to keep a good deal back. I wouldn't tell him the nonsense the poor dear boy talks, for the world. Oh, no, my dear! Oh, no! Sir Edward's not well, this morning. To tell you the truth I've sent a little letter round for the doctor. I've asked him to look in, accidentally. I don't want any fuss in the house. Gabie ran down to Jenkins herself with my letter. Jenkins, chauffeur, Jenkins discreet!"

"Will you tell Sir Edward then?"

"My dear little girl—tell him what?"

"That I'm engaged to John, and that I want to come and nurse him here. John needs me, I must be with him."

But Lady Seneschal was sailing along with tight-shut eyes, well-advanced in the new drift, before Margaret had ceased to speak.

"My dear little girl, tell him yourself. Haven't I said how pleased he is?—Only you'll keep off the poor dear boy's nonsense. Oh, that I must insist upon! Sir Edward mustn't know. My dear little girl, he'd go as dotty as John himself, if he heard of it. You'll make the best of everything. It'll cheer him up. Tell him John will be as well, as well as anything, in no time. And, with you to nurse him, I'm sure he will.—Sir Edward is sitting up in his dressing-room. Here, I'll call Gabie, to go up with you."

She rose alertly, rushed to the door, shrilly screaming: "Gabie, Gabie!" and, as the girl came flying into the room, handed Margaret over to her.

They had to cross the banqueting hall, and Lady Seneschal, drawing her shawl tighter over her chest with a delicate hand blazing with rings, accompanied them to the foot of the stairs, talking uninterruptedly.

"I've told Margaret, Gabie, that your father will be only too pleased to see her. And she's promised to be very discreet—very discreet. It'll cheer father up. Margaret is going to tell father how well she found John. Margaret quite understands father's not to know the way John goes on. Father knows the poor dear boy is wounded in the head, and that his memory is a little affected—temporarily affected. That's all he's to know, Weatherly says. Of course he had to be told something —John coming down here—in case the poor dear boy

should still go on in that silly way. But we hope not.—And Sir Edward being an invalid makes it easier, Margaret, you see that? We can keep things back.—Dear little girl, one of the family now! Romantic, romantic. Father will be pleased."

"Oh, Margaret," said Gabrielle, her youthful face reflecting her mother's shallow smile. "Of course, I guessed—I mean to say—mother told me. I mean to say, I'm awfully glad."

She touched Margaret's cheek with a birdlike peck; and the two went up the stairs side by side, Lady Seneschal standing in the hall, looking up after them with fond amused eyes.

Sir Edward Seneschal was seated in his great armchair by the fire, a rug over his knees. There was a paper on his lap which he was not reading; and for a second, he stared at his daughter with vague eyes as if his thoughts were very far away. Then his forehead contracted fretfully.

"What is it?"

"Some one to see you, father."

"Who is it?" The fretfulness deepened in frown and voice. But his face lit up as Margaret came in. "You? How do you do.—I am very much obliged by your coming up all this way."

He had hoisted himself out of his chair, with an instinctive movement of courtesy, and stood supporting himself by the table. Margaret saw that he could not trust his strength to carry him further. Gabrielle whisked her indifference away, calling out from the door in tones as dryly cheerful as a cricket's chirrup: "She's a lot to tell you about John."

Margaret stepped quickly forward.

"Do sit down again, Sir Edward. I'll take this chair."

Sir Edward sank back into his armchair, with an indrawn breath of exhaustion and physical misery. He was scarce past sixty, but disease and sorrow had done the work of years; he looked like a man whose vitality was completely outworn. Margaret, who had not seen him since the beginning of the war, was shocked. She remembered him, erect, alert, imposing; very particular about attire, ceremonious in manner, autocratic, a little testy and withal, in a high-bred, old-fashioned way, a beau and a flirt. She would barely have recognized him; nevertheless he remained, as ever, the great gentleman. She, who was of those who notice, was instantly aware that his meticulous attention to dress was unaltered. His country suit of mourning, the set of his black corded silk tie, the black pearl pin, the black enamel links in the striped silk shirt, all showed that, unlike his wife, Sir Edward's attention to personal appearance was a tribute to his own self-respect. Equally unlike Lady Seneschal, grief had laid hold of him.

The only tongue that perhaps expresses human sorrow to its utmost depth, speaks from the Bible:

"*And now my soul fadeth within myself: and the days of affliction possess me.*

"*In the night my bone is pierced with sorrow: and they that feed upon me do not sleep.*"

The words rose in Margaret's mind as she looked upon the man who had been her old enemy. A large compassion overflowed her heart towards him.

The whole room was filled with memorials of his dead sons; the chimneypiece was crowded with their prizes, with the medals, cups, and trophies won at school and

University. The Seneschal boys—there had been but a year between them—had run neck and neck a fine athletic course. Through all their adolescence the only rivals they had found hard to beat had been each other.

Framed photographs of school groups and college teams hung on the walls. At his elbow, on the table, were prize books, in the wonderful shiny calf and armorial bindings that are so unmistakable, and somehow so unattractive: Stephen's books; Edward had never been a scholar. But Edward's were the foils crossed on the panel opposite to her. And, on the top of the tallboy, the bundle of boxing gloves had belonged to both. From every side the young faces looked down at her—so alike in their straight, clean-cut features, their frank eyes, their firm, kind mouths—Edward the handsome, Stephen the more intellectual. The imminence of their presence and a heartrending sense of loss, at one and the same time, seemed to Margaret Amber to fill the atmosphere of the room in singular conflict.

But there was anger in the sadness of the impression, too. Where was John? What had he ever done that he should be as the Ishmael of the tribe? John, now the only hope! Then she saw, and repented of her rash judgment, that a double-shelved table at the right hand of the invalid was completely consecrated to John.

The dark face, so unlike the Seneschal tradition, was there, in every stage; from the cherubic babyhood when it looked like that of a Murillo infant, to the last snapshot from India—lean and fierce as an Arab. Everything Sir Edward could gather was there; even a pile of telegrams which she guessed to be War Office communications.

In a flash she understood; a flash revealing the intensity

of both despair and hope. The father had had a superstitious dread of associating the living with the dead! Here he sat—how many suffering hours of each day!—brooding on the past, gloating on the future. Here he would turn from the irreparable agony to the one possible joy. All that was left—John . . . John, who meant everything now! Margaret guessed that the actual fingering of the living son's portraits and letters, the perpetual re-reading of the official messages which had announced his safety, were to the bereaved man what the count of his gold is to the miser.

He was looking at her with eyes so full of feverish eagerness, that the gaze hurt her.

"You've seen John, my dear—and how did you find him?"

He could not keep the quaver from those accents of measured politeness. And, though to steady himself he gripped the arms of the chair, his whole frame shook.

She did not answer at once. There was so much to say, and her instinct was ever to say the least possible. She had to select. His brows contracted; his bloodless fingers began to play an irritable tattoo on each arm of the chair. Then to the impatience on his countenance succeeded an agonized apprehension.

"He did not know his mother," said Sir Edward, hoarsely. "They don't tell me much, but they let out things. They let that out. I'm not a child to be kept in the dark!" His voice broke, querulously. "You'll tell me the truth; you were always truthful. I count on you to tell me the truth." But his piteous eyes pleaded for comfort, and he shrank back in his chair as if from the expected blow.

Margaret flung up her head: "Ah, but he knew me!"

The sick man caught fire at the glow in her whole air, in her voice. He leaned forward with a fluttering movement of his hands: "He knew you!"

"He knew me. He was so happy to see me. He fell asleep in my arms, like a child. The doctor thinks he will get well very quickly. All John wants is to come home. He wants Thornbarrow and me! Between us we will heal him."

Triumph pealed into her voice, love and certainty, like rivaling organ notes. Sir Edward stared at her; first a little bewildered, then with a reflection of her exaltation.

"Thank you, my dear, thank you," he faltered. "This is a great relief. You remove a weight from my mind, you give me new life."

The girl surveyed him thoughtfully, the ardor dying from her countenance.

"I asked to see you," she said. "There is no use trying to speak to Lady Seneschal. I'll not have John made unhappy any more."

He cast down his eyes, under her straight glance. A flush stained his leaden pallor.

"There should be nothing now to make John unhappy," he murmured.

"There ought not to be," said she. "But one never knows. He has been tormented enough."

John's father lifted his drooped eyelids and looked full at his visitor. That look was a revelation. It told her of a long martyrdom; of a proud man's impotence; of bitter struggles and defeats; of resentful consciousness of abasement. The glance was dropped again; his face twitched.

Margaret's voice softened as she pursued:

"I've told Lady Seneschal, I want to come here and

nurse John. Please tell her that you approve; that it is your wish. Oh, don't you see? I've got to keep him from being bothered and talked at, and driven. I understand him. I shall always know the moment things are too much for him."

"But, my dear——"

"I am a trained Red Cross nurse, I am quite capable"——

He made a courteous gesture:

"I am quite sure you are." Then, with a certain ceremony, he went on: "You are always welcome at Thornbarrow, and in these circumstances——" He broke off, his blue eyes so strangely full of life in a countenance that was already almost a death-mask, scrutinized her. "You have renewed your engagement to my son John?"

"It never was broken," she flashed. Her heart rose. "You all tried to part us," she began, then refrained. She could not hurl reproaches at any one so close to the final reckoning.

She was glad she had not said more when she saw him glance upward at the picture of young Edward over the chimneypiece. Surely he had been punished where he had sinned! She moved restlessly on her chair. She knew that he was longing to have some details about John, but give them she could not. There was a silence, then Sir Edward had a whimsical smile.

"We could not desire anything better for our son."

It was the unasked-for ratification. His smile took an edge of almost cruel satire: "Lady Seneschal will be extremely pleased. I do not think," he went on, and the quiet gentleness of his tone and manner were in peculiar contrast to the twist on his lips and the glitter in his eye, "I do not think you need anticipate the least diffi-

culty now on her side, in connection with any plan you may like to make."

Circumstances alter cases—or as Lady Seneschal had jocosely pattered it out, "cases alter circumstances," thought Margaret cynically, and rose to go.

"It's all clear, then," she said in her frank way. "I am glad I came."

"I am glad you did."

He held her warm young hand in his chill clasp, without, this time, attempting to rise. She was now one of the family. He was a master of these shades of conduct. He did not ask her to linger, except by the pleading of his eyes. Her own filled with tears as she looked down at him. His hand drew her tremulously. She bent and kissed him, and the last rancor towards him in her heart died as her lips touched the sad forehead.

"God bless you!" he murmured.

She went out, feeling that an added sanctity had been granted to her plighted love.

Gabrielle met her at the foot of the stairs and slipped a hand within her arm.

"I am going to see Granny," she chirped. "Mother said perhaps you'd come with me. Granny would like it. We're all so pleased, you know." Gabrielle's fingers caressed Margaret's forearm; Margaret thought there was no more feeling in them than in the claws of a bird.

"I would like to see old Lady Seneschal," she answered thoughtfully.

"We'll try and tell her, shall we?" Gabrielle laughed. "Mother tried. She tried for an hour yesterday to make her understand about John. Granny couldn't. I say, you know our Vicar, Mr. Dominick—I call him Father Dominick—he's away; he's had a dreadful attack of

influenza and has been sent to Brighton to recuperate—I feel so lost without him, somehow!" She gave a conscious giggle: "I always think a clergyman, a priest, stands to one. You know what I mean. If we could get him to explain things to Granny—I'm sure mother will never get her to understand—she's there now, mother is; and she thought if she introduced you, I mean—I mean in the new light, John's *fiancée*. What, what——"

Margaret reasserted the fact: "It's not a new light."

Gabrielle flung her an amused, curious look.

"Oh, well, you can't expect me to enter into that."

After which there was silence on Margaret's part, while John's sister prattled on gayly of Granny's growing peculiarities and how hard it was for mother to live between two invalids.

The Seneschal Dower House had once been a royal hunting lodge when the Chase was all crown demesne. It was said that Norman kings had set forth from its precincts to hunt the great oak forests. But Henry VIII had rebuilt the place and it still went by his name, King's Lodge. Unspoilt, externally at least, by any succeeding occupant, it remained like the great House, a gem of a last architecture. No attempt had been made, either, to bring its surroundings into touch with modern convention. It stood unenclosed, backed by the wood, facing the Downs. There was no formal approach to it, no road save a grass drive on one side, the open turf on the other.

Mother and daughter-in-law were together. The dowager Lady Seneschal belonged to the generation which, however proud of its ancient traditions, considered oak paneling gloomy, and a preference for antique furniture affectation. She had been still in the prime of life when

she moved to the Dower House, and she had had it refitted to her taste. The old oak walls of the parlor which she called the drawing-room had been painted white. Comfortable armchairs, upholstered in crimson and pinafored with a hollyhock chintz, each provided with a plump pink-silk cushion, were dotted about the flowery carpet. A large brass cage of canary birds hung between the curtains, white lace within the damask. The tables were strewn with photographs, knickknacks—the knickknacks that were fashionable when old Lady Seneschal had been young. A chandelier, glittering with glass drops, hung from the heavily molded ceiling. Cataracts of cut-glass also adorned the chimneypiece, flanking an ormolu clock, crowded with allegorical figures.

An asthmatic fox terrier lay snoring on the white-bear hearthrug. And, sitting bolt upright in the most majestic of the armchairs, her feet on a berlin woolwork footstool, her beautiful old hands folded in her lap, old Lady Seneschal sat before a blazing coal fire which had already scorched one side of her daughter-in-law's delicate face to scarlet.

Margaret and Gabrielle were solemnly announced by the fat butler, who looked injured at having been twice summoned to the door on the same morning. For the dowager no more encouraged any free and easy running in and out on the part of her family than she would have permitted a coal-box in her drawing-room, or the handling of a letter otherwise than on a salver.

She was a tall, old woman, and, in spite of her great age, still exceedingly handsome. Incomplete as was occasionally her control over her faculties, she kept a fine state both in her person and her household. The flowing black satin of her attire, the film of lace and tulle with which

she surrounded her face and hands, set off the extraordinary delicacy, the mother-of-pearl tints of her skin. Her faded eyes looked out with conscious power upon her little world. They were now turned questioningly upon the newcomers. Her eyebrows, dark, straight and bushy with age, were raised.

"Who are you? Do I know you?" she terrifically asked.

The younger Lady Seneschal, who had broken off in the middle of some involved sentence, presented rather a beaten look. She rose with alacrity.

"Dear little girls—dear little girls!—I've been trying to explain about you, Margaret dear, but Granny could not quite understand me. Could you, Granny?"

Here a withering smile crossed the beautiful old face. The dowager lifted one of her ring-laden hands, and let it drop again on her knee with a gesture full of significance. Her glance met Margaret's. And as Margaret smiled, the old lady was suddenly shaken with a small, amused laugh; whoever the young person was, she had quick wits.

"Here is Margaret to speak for herself. Margaret, you know, Granny. Margaret Amber—Amber, Amber!"

"You needn't repeat it again, Amelia," said the mother-in-law in her bass voice. "I'm not deaf and I'm not an idiot. It is not a name I should be likely to forget, although I certainly have not heard it before. How do you do? Pray, sit down. It's very kind of you to come and see me."

"Oh, but dear Granny, you've heard it a hundred times."

"I confess I did not count, my dear, but you may be quite accurate."

Lady Seneschal flung a glance of despair at the two girls and shrugged her shoulders.

"Dear Granny, I mean, I mean, you've heard of our neighbors, these twenty years. Ambers—our neighbors at Vale Royal, Lord Amber."

"Maybe so, Amelia; I will not be so impolite as to contradict you. Though you will permit me to say that I never did hear of a Lord Amber till this moment."

Gabrielle, who had been sitting motionless, looking like a little ivory statuette, here suddenly became endowed with life and broke into voluble speech:

"Margaret is engaged to John. You must be pleased! We're all so pleased. John's come back. He's in a hospital in London, wounded, you know, in the war. He'll soon be coming down. Won't that be nice? Margaret saw him yesterday. And he knew her! We're all so pleased. He's going to get quite well. This is Margaret. You remember Margaret? She used to play with —with Edward and Stephen and John, when they were little boys. Didn't you, Margaret? Of course, most with John. She always liked John best. Lord Amber—he wasn't Lord Amber then—he hasn't been Lord Amber very long—oh, Granny——"

She stopped suddenly. The deep voice had boomed:

"Edward, Stephen and John! I saw them all three last night. They came in just after dusk. I thought John looked pale."

A spasm came over Lady Seneschal's face. She rose.

"Granny's not up to us to-day," she said hurriedly.

Her nerves were pretty strong, but they were never quite proof against this sort of thing. Old Lady Seneschal had such a natural, every-day manner in her divagations.

"Come here, my dear," said the dowager to Margaret and held out her ring-covered hand.

The girl bent a scared face towards the old, handsome countenance. John's grandmother had an air of considerable shrewdness, of not ill-natured malice, as she scrutinized her visitor.

"So they've made up their minds to let you have him at last," she said with a startling flash of memory. "Great fuss and nonsense you and Edward made about it, Amelia!" Still holding Margaret's hand, she turned upon her daughter-in-law. "I don't know anything about your Ambers and your titles, my dear," she went on, patting the heiress's fingers. "I'm too old for new people and their new titles, but you're a well-looking girl, and I understand you have money. The whole thing is very suitable, and so I told my son, and so I tell Amelia. Don't you believe them when they talk of sending the boy to India. Just you hold fast, and they won't do anything so silly. You know you never would, Amelia, let all that money out of the family."

"Do come, mother! Do come, Margaret!" cried Gabrielle, pulling her mother by the sleeve.

"Pray don't let me keep either of you," said the dowager with great dignity. She released Margaret's hand to extend two fingers to her daughter-in-law, turning her head so that the perfunctory salute should alight only on her cap. "Good-by, Amelia. I take it very kind of you to pay me a visit. Good-by, Gabrielle—no, my dear, I have no desire for your kisses till you mend your manners. Has your mother never told you that it is very ill-bred to interrupt? Sit down again, my dear—what is your name?—Margaret. We'll have a little talk.

You mayn't be so very well born, but for a cadet it's a nice marriage—and I like your face."

She folded her hands on her black satin lap and again humorously contemplated Margaret.

"Tell me, now, what is there about you to make young Edward want to marry you, too, and why do you prefer John? Edward's my favorite, you know. I don't mind saying it. He's the pick of the bunch, and I always did like an eldest son myself. But it's John you want, is it? Poor Edward, is there no hope for him?"

"None at all," said Margaret hoarsely. She drooped her eyelids to hide the rising tears. It was all so piteous.

"Well, well," the grandmother was smiling, "it will be a very good thing for John. Why didn't he come with you to-day?"

"He is in London."

"Indeed! He went up this morning, I suppose?"

"I think I must go," said Margaret hurriedly. She felt she could not bear to hear the old complacent lips refer again to that visit in the dusk.

"Dear me, young people are very abrupt nowadays!" But the dowager was not offended. "I don't mind your kissing me, my dear. I like your face."

Margaret plunged into the woods, to avoid any chance of meeting John's mother and sister again. She determined, when she reached Vale Royal, to telephone to London for news of her soldier. That both old Roger and the dowager should have spoken of seeing him in the company of his dead brothers disturbed her more than she cared to own to herself. She was not superstitious or fanciful, and war-service had strengthened, not diminished, her natural courage. "But Thornbarrow always was

a haunted place," she said to herself. "And anyhow, old Lady Seneschal has been dotty for years."

Gabrielle leaned on her mother's arm as they tripped across the downland homewards.

"I really do believe," she said in her heartless little voice, "that Granny pretends not to know things, just to torment us. She does hate us, mother, doesn't she? I'm sure I can't think why."

CHAPTER VI

JOHN SENESCHAL'S HOME

LADY SENESCHAL received a letter from Dr. Caldwell which caused her considerable annoyance. Although the doctor informed her that early in the following week Captain Seneschal could with perfect safety be motored from London to Thornbarrow, he regretted that he could not speak so favorably of the mental state. The delusion seemed to grow stronger with the return of vigor. This was scarcely—the writer could not conceal it—a favorable symptom.

Dr. Caldwell went on to suggest, if agreeable to Sir Edward and Lady Seneschal, that he should accompany him on the journey and remain the night at Thornbarrow. This would give him an opportunity not only of witnessing for himself the effect of the homecoming—which might certainly be regarded as a test—but also of a consultation with the local practitioner who was to take over the charge of the patient. Captain Seneschal would require very careful watching for some time, and Lady Seneschal and his family must be prepared for considerable difficulty; the young man was determined to make clear that he was not returning to them as a son. The doctor concluded with the hope that the sudden rush of association might sweep away the "fixed idea," but it could not be sufficiently insisted upon that any attempt to force the issue by argument might prove exceedingly prejudicial.

There was a postscript:

I understand from a letter received from Miss Amber that she may be your guest at Thornbarrow when Captain Seneschal returns. I trust this plan will be carried out. She seemed to me to exercise a very beneficent influence.

Lady Seneschal interrupted her perusal with irate ejaculations: "Here's a pretty thing! What nonsense! What is the good of Dr. Caldwell, if he cannot do better for his patient? A cool hand! Goodness knows what kind of a bill he will send in! As for John—as for John's nonsense, it must be put a stop to!"

Gabrielle found her walking up and down the room, shaking and tapping the document, while she fumed. The girl nipped it dexterously from her hand and began reading it to the tune of the maternal objurgations:

"Cool, I must say! Cool, Gabie! Ordering me who I am to have—what I'm to say; what I am not to say! Inviting himself to the house. Who's to pay the bill, I want to know? Who's to pay the bill?"

But the daughter was occasionally able to throw a spray of common sense on the mother's fires. She had not a great deal of judgment; but she had more than Lady Seneschal, and in this case exercised it.

"Don't be absurd, mother. Don't be absurd! Of course you must let Dr. Caldwell come. Of course everything must be done for John. Oh, nonsense, mother! You must see that for yourself. If poor John remains dotty, we can't help it, but it will be much pleasanter for us if he don't. You do see that, mother?"

Lady Seneschal had been thinking of Dr. Caldwell's check. There had been some truth in the statement which Gabrielle had once made, half sympathizingly, half philosophically. "Mother had rather have a tooth drawn

than draw a check." Since assuming the control of affairs upon Sir Edward's illness, this peculiarity had grown upon her to the point of mania. She now perceived, however, that here might after all be money expended to advantage.

"Perhaps you are right, my dear little girl," she conceded. "Something must be risked, I suppose."

So Dr. Caldwell's suggestions were agreed to, and Margaret Amber was duly bidden to Thornbarrow for the day of her lover's arrival.

It was late April. The gorse in the hollows had dropped most of its gold, but the primroses still spread their delicate moon tints in the lee of banks and hedgerows. The thorn trees were bejeweled with breaking buds of white. The green of the Downs was fire in the sunshine, and the young oak leaves glowed like bronze, new from the furnace. Thornbarrow Chase, clothed in full spring glories, seemed secretly astir with other than the mere annual rejuvenescence.

Margaret, as she came across the Chase—she had sent her maid on with her luggage and preferred the walk—thought that she had never felt more keenly the spirit activities about the place. More than ever, to-day, she felt as if she were on the brink of seeing or hearing something strange and unearthly. From behind a group of thorns, down in the black alley of a hazel grove, and yet again, beyond the great Barrow, some one was surely waiting, just on the point of stepping forward to meet her. The sensation grew in intensity; it was a presence poignantly familiar!

She told herself that John's impatient soul, forestalling space and time, was already with her. There was

surely nothing to startle, nothing to distress her, in this. Nevertheless she became more and more conscious of trouble within herself; of trouble without, menacing that gray house, even on this way of welcome. Then the fantasy that John was actually beside her became so real that more than once she turned her head swiftly, expecting, against fact or reason, to see him. She had a strange confused impression that he was urging something upon her, which baffled his power of expression and her understanding. For one moment it was an actual agony of mind, a nightmare groping in the unknown. Then suddenly, all dissolved into a radiant sense of peace. The threat passed like a cloud.

"John is coming home to-day," she said, "and nothing can matter now!" And the invisible John who went with her—surely her impatient lover was thinking of her very earnestly, and their thoughts, meeting, seemed to smile and agree.

She found Lady Seneschal and Gabie in full bustle of preparation. A warm welcome was extended to her. Both mother and daughter had an air of happiness which touched her, though she knew its superficiality. She was consulted on a hundred points concerning which they had been at variance. Lady Seneschal and Gabrielle had a habit of wrangling over every minor detail.

"I tell mother he'll like his old room."

"Oh, my dear little girl, nonsense, nonsense! My dear Margaret, I'm sure you'll agree with me: the big west room, the big west room!"

"I say, my dear, an invalid—an invalid—worst thing in the world to stuff the place with flowers; too anciting, too extoxicating—you know what I mean——"

"And I say, mother, the poor boy will love to see the

flowers. They all do. Oh, come, mother, when you think he's been in a Turkish prison——"

"Well, you can put them in the hall, anyhow!" cried John's affianced. "And daffodils don't smell strong. I'll fill the bowls."

As she ran out into the bright, fresh air, all her eerie feelings had vanished. She could laugh at the memory of Lady Seneschal and Gabrielle amiably bickering like two chattering sparrows. Each time she snapped the long, juicy stalk and laid a golden daffodil into her basket, she thought how it would gladden John's eyes and felt nothing but the joy of the hour.

When she reëntered the house, she found Lady Seneschal and Gabrielle in busy consultation over a telegram just received.

"He's started!" cried the sister, shrilly.

Lady Seneschal looked up from the sheet that fluttered in her hand, and said, with a rasp of vexed anxiety in her voice:

"Caldwell says—Caldwell says his head is very bad."

"Oh, no, mother, he doesn't."

"My dear little girl, I say he does. Mental condition most—most—there, read for yourself."

She thrust the sheet into Margaret's clasp, angrily, as if she considered her partly responsible for the general unpleasantness. Margaret read:

> Expect arrive about four o'clock, patient able to bear journey, but must warn you mental condition continues very unsatisfactory.

"I suppose," said Margaret, slowly raising steady eyes out of a blanched face, "that we are all prepared for this."

Lady Seneschal exploded.

"It's very easy for you to talk! Prepared? Prepared! Hold your tongue, Gabie. It's very easy for Margaret to talk. He knows her. She can sit and hold his hand. That's what she's here for, I suppose. Yes, my dear, I know, it's all very right and proper. We are very pleased. But, if he doesn't know his father, there'll be the devil to fry—there'll be the devil to fry. It's all very well, Gabie, it's all very well, Margaret. You can talk very glib, both of you. Prepared! prepared! But if John goes and tells his poor father that he's buried John Seneschal—well, my dear, you know what Weatherby says every time he comes: 'Another shock would kill him, Lady Seneschal—would kill him.' And if poor dear John goes and buries himself to his father, it will be burying his father, too, as sure—as sure as eggs!" cried Lady Seneschal on a tragic high note.

"Well, mother, then John must be kept away from father."

"You silly little girl—you silly little girl! Just tell me how you will do that. You can't stuff father with a cock-and-bull story about John, now when he'll know he's expected, when he'll hear him arrive; when he'll know him actually in the house! Father's weak in the legs—but he's not weak in the head like poor dear John——"

Margaret grew scarlet. She interrupted: "I'll make John understand."

"Understand what?"

"I'll tell him not to upset his father."

Lady Seneschal stared at the girl without speaking and there was, for an instant, a flash of something like hatred in her shallow eyes. With the second thought, however, expediency put jealousy to shame.

"Oh, my dear, if you can accomplish that, it will be

the best thing any one ever did for us all! *Soulagement,*" said Lady Seneschal, who now and then broke into a fluent but imperfect French. "*Soulagement, soulagement, tout à fait.*"

Margaret had many times marveled at the Seneschals, mother and daughter, but never more than in that hour of expectation, between the first reasonable moment when the car might be descried in the avenue, and its rather belated appearance. She found herself driven into a kind of stony composure and stillness in sheer self-defense. It was her way to be silent in the great moments. The deeper the feeling the less could she find expression for it. But Lady Seneschal's feelings were not deep; all the depth that good lady possessed lay in her scheming wits. As for Gabrielle, she was so far but a mere shell of pretty life, whatever experience might yet awaken in her.

Margaret, old Hod at her feet, sat in the outer hall, the narrow oaken door of which was open to the approach. Her eyes fixed across the rolling Down upon that distant point where the motor must first show itself, her ears straining for the sound of the hooter, she smoked slowly one cigarette after another, and avoided as much as possible even answering her hostess. Not indeed that Lady Seneschal ever expected or cared for a reply.

"They are like wandering souls, *âmes en peine,*" thought Margaret as the two fluttered backwards and forwards from hall to porch, chattering across each other, contradicting each other and vainly, inanely, speculating, discussing, in the same tone, agonizing possibilities and ridiculous trifles. "But," Margaret reflected, "I don't believe they have any souls at all. Dolls, stuffed with sawdust, with *papier maché* heads, though, in Lady Sene-

schal's at least, there's a kind of clock-work so superior as to be capable both of malice and cunning."

She wished herself upstairs, sitting beside the arm-chair where, wrapped in his sad reserve, the dying father waited. Only, who would dare intrude just now upon that tragic solitude? Besides, she could not, must not, miss the first sight of the car which held her beloved. She had expected to hear the hoot at the gates of the middle lodge, but all at once, without a sound of warning, the dark shape came flying into her vision. She got up; her knees trembled under her. Then the horn resounded, and Lady Seneschal and Gabrielle came rushing into the outer hall with a clatter of tongues that sounded like a disturbed aviary.

The old dog rose stiffly and turned a look of almost human inquiry upon Margaret; then, perhaps excited by Lady Seneschal's ringing of bells and Gabrielle's shrill calls for the butler, gave one deep baying cry.

"He knows!" said Margaret.

Her heart was beating to suffocation, strong in soul and body as she was, when the car came to a grinding standstill, and she saw, as through a mist, the keen, dark, worn face under the narrow white bandage at the window.

Whether it be because our finite nature is incapable of tasting any emotion greater than its own limits or whether the expectant heart unconsciously places its ideals too high, it is safe to say that scarcely ever does the moment of reunion fulfill the anticipated ecstasy. Too often it is flat, savorless, if not a chill disappointment. The power of feeling seems all at once to find itself paralyzed. The smile of welcome stiffens on the lips; the words of love and greeting become frozen or, worse, forced. The happiness of rediscovery is not yet. Happiness, indeed, is so

shy a bird that it evades the grasping hand and only settles, plumes its wings and is at rest, when we no longer reach for it.

Margaret Amber found the homecoming of her John an experience not only brimming with sadness—which was natural enough in the circumstances—but full of trouble, of a jarring sense of confusion, for which she could find no adequate reason.

She thought that Dr. Caldwell and the elderly army sister whom she remembered bustled John in between them with the air of keepers. The doctor's countenance was gloomy, his brow was knotted, his manner abrupt; his accents were at once peremptory and perfunctory. He allowed no one time to speak before issuing his orders:

"Pray, Lady Seneschal, let there be no talking here. Give me a moment to get your son into the house. Come, Lady Seneschal, no demonstration just now, I beg! Captain Seneschal, you must not stop out here. Sister, be good enough to ask for your room and go straight there. Now, every one go into the house. Please!"

Margaret drew back against the oak screen, holding Hod by the collar. A passion of truth and love, and anger, was in her soul. How dare they treat him as if he were mad? How dare that doctor order him about, and hustle him? He went between them, she thought, like one dazed, but his eyes roamed from side to side, recognizing—yes, she was sure—recognizing!

Yet he passed her and Hod without seeing either of them. She saw that he held himself erect and that, though there was a marked hesitation in his step, it did not seem to spring so much from physical weakness as from mental uncertainty. She followed Lady Seneschal and Gabrielle who clung together—for once awed to silence—into the

banqueting hall in time to see him stop, as if memories called upon him with an actual voice. He flung up his head, looked this way and that: "Thornbarrow—Thornbarrow at last!" he murmured.

At this moment Lady Seneschal turned upon him and exclaiming in a high-pitched, hysterical voice: "After all I'm a mother, a mother!" flung her arms round his neck. "John—John—kiss me, John!"

Margaret heard rather than saw the gesture with which Dr. Caldwell snapped exasperated fingers. All her energies were concentrated on John, who disengaged himself from the maternal embrace with what she could not but see was a kind of horror. Gabrielle was about to cast herself also upon his breast; but he, keeping the mother at arm's length with out-flung hand, fixed Dr. Caldwell with a dark gaze of indignation and cried:

"This is intolerable! This is against all you have promised!"

"Captain Seneschal," said the doctor, and more than ever his tone was that of one bent upon taming—like the crack of a whip, thought Margaret—"Captain Seneschal, control yourself and remember at least the courtesy due to ladies!"

There was a painful silence. The soldier had an air as of a trapped creature. His eyes, searching from side to side, fell on Margaret. Immediately his whole countenance softened; his lip quivered.

"Margaret!——" He spoke the name as if unawares.

She came forward and took him by both hands.

"Yes, John, it is I. Sit down here in the big armchair. Oh, how tired you look! Now, here is Gabrielle—little Gabie. She will get you a cup of tea. Won't you, Gabie? Now, I'm going to sit beside you. And, look, here's an-

other friend! No, don't look at me, dear John. Look down at your feet."

Dr. Caldwell, with an imperative gesture, imposed silence on Lady Seneschal, then he drew her forcibly into the background, placing himself before her while, with intensity, he watched Margaret's dealing with his patient. He saw that the young man obeyed her as if the mere sound of her voice soothed, almost hypnotized him.

John had sunk into the armchair at her bidding and now, shifting his gaze from her face, he submissively let it fall upon the old dog who was cautiously sniffing at his knees. His languid hand went out with the unconscious impulse of the dog-lover and fondled the curly head, once raven black, now so grizzled.

"Never Hod?" he said in a wondering voice. "Oh, poor fellow, how old!".

"Ah, John, eight years!" said Margaret. Her eyes filled with tears. There seemed to her such an unutterable sadness in his voice. But he had known Hod at once; there was much comfort in that. How stupid they all were, how little they knew how to treat him. How glad she was that she had come!

"Was it eight years?" said John. "I knew it was a long time."

Nothing could have been more quietly sensible than the tone of this remark. But on the heel of the joy this gave her came a renewed stab, this time from an unexpected quarter. Hod, with a final and rejecting sniff, turned away from the khaki knee and, with a long shuddering sigh, the old melancholy dog, head and tail drooping, began stiffly to pick his way towards the door.

"We must give him time," exclaimed Margaret. "Hod, Hod, come back! Hod! Here's your own dear master!"

Hod paused by the door and looked dimly across the space in the direction of the voice; then, raising his head, he uttered a single lamentable howl.

"Good God!" cried Lady Seneschal.

For once, she somehow expressed the unreasonable sense of tragedy that had fallen over them all. Gabrielle put down her full teacup, fluttered to the door and opened it. Hod crawled out.

"I told you!" cried the girl, her voice tinkling like a toy bell. "I told Margaret it would have been much kinder to put the poor old thing out of his pain. He doesn't know what to do with himself with rheumatism. I'm sure he's dotty, too. Don't all old dogs get dotty? Now, John, here's your tea. I'll put a little table here. And you'll have a scone, won't you? Poor old Mrs. Melmoth is dead, you know. But the new housekeeper makes quite jolly scones—look here, Margaret, I think John's upset. What nonsense to be upset about a dog! Hod will soon know you, John."

"Why should he know me?" The young man put the cup on the table and gazed up with a return of the wild trapped look. Gabrielle drew back, her pretty face suddenly withered with fright. Her bright, small eyes appealed helplessly to Doctor Caldwell.

"Well, I'm sure," she stammered, "dogs generally know their masters, don't they?"

The soldier interrupted her loudly, angrily.

"I am not Hod's master."

"Oh, my dear boy, my dear boy! Oh, doctor, think of his father upstairs! Was there ever such an unfortunate complication? I'm sure it would have been better, a thousand times, if the poor dear boy had lost a leg or

an arm—anything but his memory. Oh, what shall we do?"

Lady Seneschal's accents rose to wailing. Once again Margaret intervened. "Lady Seneschal—hush, John, let me speak! Will you all go away, please. Dr. Caldwell, take them away and leave me with John. And—oh, yes, we must not forget that Sir Edward is waiting. Gabie, tell your father that I will bring John to him in half an hour, when he has rested a little."

Perhaps Lady Seneschal might not have been amenable to the course so obviously dictated by the urgency of the situation, had it not been for the authority of the surgeon.

"You cannot do better for the present," he said, "than leave everything in Miss Amber's hands."

Reasonableness was the last of Lady Seneschal's characteristics; but she let herself be hustled out of the room.

"Don't you see it's your one chance?" he whispered in her ear, as he propelled her by the elbow.

CHAPTER VII

JUST JOHN AND MARGARET

NOW," said Margaret as the door closed, "don't say a word, John. No, to please me, don't speak. I am going to make you a fresh cup of tea instead of this wash." She looked contemptuously at Gabrielle's weak brew, picked it up and marched over to the tea-table where the great silver urn was bubbling and spurting.

He lay back, watching, his anxious, well-nigh agonized expression giving way to a kind of peace. Then, sitting down beside him, she made him drink and eat, speaking little beyond an abrupt phrase now and then: "You can, if you try—oh, yes, John, you must—come, one more!"

Next she lit a cigarette for him and one for herself, only then opening the vital question:

"Now, John, tell me why you say you are not John Seneschal."

Instantly the comfort, the quietude which her ministrations had brought him, vanished. His hand began to tremble, his brow became furrowed under the bandage. He sat up sharply, and flung the cigarette into space with the gesture of a man who scarcely knows what he is doing.

"It's the most horrible mistake!" he cried in a harsh, shaken voice. "John Seneschal is dead. He must be dead, since I remember burying him!"

"But then—oh, John dear, steady! You can trust me, can't you? Who do you think you are?"

He put his trembling hand to his bandaged forehead. "Ah—who am I?"

"You can't tell me that?"

"No, no——" He dropped both hands and clenched them. His eyes became fixed. "It's all gone. I can't remember—I can't think!"

"Oh, what a beast I am," thought Margaret. "If it wasn't for that horrid woman's lies to poor Sir Edward! My darling, to think that I, I, should torment you!" She laid her strong grasp upon his clenched hands. "Don't try to remember anything," she urged. "John, look at me, listen to me. I am right in calling you John, am I not?" He nodded. "And you know I am Margaret!"

His harassed gaze relaxed; a faint smile crept to his lips.

"Oh, yes, I know you are Margaret!" And then he added, with a sort of childlike relief: "And I know I am John." His hand crept to his breast pocket: "I have got you there," he said. "I could not bury you."

The chill which all manifestation of insanity must bring to the healthy-minded came over her, but she answered quietly: "No, of course not."

"Not with John Seneschal, I mean."

"Ah, no!" she cried.

The passion of her love leaped. She checked the impulse to fling her arms about him and lay her lips upon his. His love for her was the one thing that had triumphed over the submerging tides. He had lost everything, even to the sense of his own identity. The cruel bullet that had struck him in mid-forehead and cast him upon the desert sands as into a grave, had not obliterated the faithful thought of her. But he had not yet—and oh, it was like

him, nobly honorable in his confusion—as much as expressed by a touch the longing which she read in his eyes. How careful must she be. The sick spirit was groping towards her, how easily, in the complicated darkness of its delusion, might it not be scared, bruised, hurt!

She cast away her cigarette in her turn.

"Since you trust me, will you do what I want? I am going to tell you exactly what I want you to do."

His gaze answered her before the wondering relief of that "Yes."

"We'll let it rest on that. You are John. I am Margaret. Just John and Margaret!"

"Just John and Margaret," he repeated, and once more peace returned to his countenance.

"We will leave it at that," she went on, pursuing her advantage with eagerness. "Don't try to drag up the past. It will all come of itself, oh, I am quite certain, very soon. Meanwhile, you must stay here, and just get well. You have done all you can, and it is not your fault if they won't believe you. I will see they do not worry you. You understand? Do you agree?"

She held out her hand and he grasped it, as one blind, or drowning, or falling, might catch at his single chance of help.

"One thing more, John. Upstairs, there is the old father——"

The gleam that had a fierce terror in it sprang back to his eyes. Margaret felt her own heart beat up to her throat. Her mouth became suddenly parched; she could scarcely speak. But she went on bravely:

"Sir Edward—you know—oh, John, you know that Eddie and Steve are both gone! Ah, you knew! You had heard! It nearly killed Sir Edward. He is very ill.

He can't live long. John, he does not know——" She paused. How was she to word it so as not to evoke again the torment of the fixed idea. "He does not know what you have told us all. They were afraid to tell him." Again she groped for words. "You must not tell him that John Seneschal is dead—his last son! It would just extinguish him—it would kill him. He can't live more than two or three months, anyhow."

"Two or three months," repeated he. He cast his frenzied look, seeking escape, about the room. Then, as it settled back on her it grew saner, quieter, even began to gather an understanding pity.

"It is all very sad," he murmured.

"Yes, John, but you'll help to make it less so!"

"Is not the truth best always, living or dying?" he asked her.

"Not as it would be now. Not while everything is so clouded. Spare him that. And remember—he is on the threshold of all knowledge."

His grasp tightened upon hers, but she scarcely felt the pain, for the grip that was on her heart.

"John, come upstairs with me now, and see——" she hesitated and fell back on her first phrase: "the old father."

"I cannot tell him that I am John Seneschal."

"Oh, my dear stupid boy!" she exclaimed, half laughing, half crying, "of course not! That would be silly! You just let him talk, and be glad of you, and bid you welcome home. And, no, you needn't even call him father. Why should you? You can say, 'Sir.' You always did, you know."

He flung her a sad, haunted glance which denied the recollection. But as she said "Come" he got up, let him-

self be led out of the room and upstairs, with the docility of a child.

"Here's John!" said Margaret as she pushed open the door of Sir Edward's room.

Lady Seneschal, scarlet and agitated but for once mute, stood behind her husband's armchair. And Gabrielle, who was aimlessly turning over books on the table, looked up and displayed a countenance set like a small stone mask. Both had, Margaret thought, a certain inimicality in the anxiety of the gaze they turned upon John.

Sir Edward sat for a moment gripping the arms of his chair, his blue eyes staring hungrily. At sight of the soldier's slow, uncertain advance, his bandaged head, his wan and haggard face; at sight, especially, of the unrejoicing, stricken gaze, he exclaimed: "Good God—the boy is not blind, is he?" and lifted himself out of his chair to totter forward, with arms extended.

"No, no, he's not blind!" Margaret cried. Then she called sharply: "John, your father will fall if you don't hold him!"

The young man caught the swaying figure. The broken soldier and the bereaved father held each other clasped. And John Tempest felt the tears of John Seneschal's father on his cheek and heard, murmured in his ears, the blessing of John Seneschal's father on his son.

The teeth of the trap had begun to fasten upon him.

When Sir Edward staggered back into his chair and wiped the sweat from his forehead, the young man stood gazing down on him with the look of one who has been betrayed into crime. Some one touched him on the shoulder. It was Dr. Caldwell.

"Come," said he in ordinary brisk tones. "There has been enough for one day, I think. Your son has done a

good deal, Sir Edward, and come out of it very well. Don't you think so? Of course, I hate to break up a happy family party." Margaret detected sarcasm here, and divined that he was seething with ill-temper, caused partly, no doubt, by professional disappointment, partly, perhaps, by the irritating quality of Lady Seneschal. "But, doctor's duty, you know. It must be bed for my patient, and no company till to-morrow morning. Come in, sister," he went on cavalierly. "Take Captain Seneschal to his room, please. I have explained that he is to be entirely in your charge till the morning."

The nurse bustled in. "Come, Captain Seneschal," she ordered in her intolerable professional manner.

Sir Edward put out his hand. "Good-night, my boy."

"Good-night, sir," said John with a start.

He felt the cold fingers close round his own with a grasp clinging, claiming. There was more anguish of possession than joy of it in the blue eyes that looked up, almost as if imploring. Then he had a confused impression of Lady Seneschal hovering and chattering, of Gabrielle pecking at his cheek as a bird might; and Margaret's hand held him and stayed the dizzy whirl. As she had led him in she led him out. The nurse went up the stairs before them with a shrug of shoulders and rattle of skirts. In the passage they paused. No one else had followed them; they were alone.

"That old man looked as if he wanted to ask my pardon—why?"

John put the question that was uppermost in the confusion of his mind.

"Because he has not forgotten all you have to forgive."

As she made this reply she lifted his hand to her lips.

Her whole soul yearned to the kiss she dared not otherwise give. He gave a great start.

"Oh, that is not right!" he cried, and flushed painfully.

The tears sprang to her eyes; passion rang in her voice:

"Don't grudge me that! What should I be worth if I were not ready to kiss the hand of every soldier who has suffered, who suffers——?" She broke off, strangled by the sob she would not allow to escape.

"Really, Miss Amber!" said the nurse, reappearing on the threshold of John's room.

"There, I hand him over to you," said the girl, laughing against the horrible ache of the unshed tears in her throat. "Good-night, John. Come—you know, we are John and Margaret for each other—say: 'Good-night, Margaret.'"

He flung her a singular look.

"Good-night—Margaret," he answered her in a deep voice full of emotion.

She watched the door close upon him, and then flew to her room, hugging the memory of his look, of his vibrating accents.

"He does love me, oh, he does love me, even as I love him! Only my poor, dear, high-souled boy, with his one mad point, thinks it wrong to show it." She cast herself on the bed, her arms embracing emptiness. "My only beloved, if I had a thousand lives, they should be all yours! If you were never to get well, never to be different, I would but love you the dearer, serve you the better. Oh, John, I will make it up to you!"

Doctor Caldwell sat down in the armchair opposite Sir Edward and surveyed him with knowledgeable gaze;

the gaze of him who reads a story of disease and decay as on a printed page which he need scarcely turn over to find the *finis* overleaf.

"If I might presume to advise you to follow Captain Seneschal's example," he said, "and retire to bed, and——" he paused, cast a whimsical look at Lady Seneschal and her daughter in full flutter of talk, then added, "solitude, I think you would find yourself the better for it to-morrow."

Sir Edward put his hands on his knees and, leaning forward, said as if the words had merely passed him by, in a voice which effort made harsh:

"My son is greatly changed."

Lady Seneschal swooped down upon him. Both she and Gabrielle had been shedding small, bright tears which made their eyes a little red but did not seem otherwise to disturb their equanimity.

"Oh, Edward! My dear Edward! Now, isn't that unreasonable, Doctor? Eight years! Eight years, eight years. India—and Kut, and prison, and the Turks, and goodness knows, starved, starved—and a wound in the head, in the head! And bandaged! What do you expect? Doctor, what does he expect? Gabie, what does your father expect? What I say is, a man may be a wounded man but that does not prevent him being human, human. Don't you agree with me, Doctor?"

"Certainly." Dr. Caldwell's smile tilted to one side; his countenance was full of humorous contempt.

Sir Edward looked across at his wife, and there was the resentment of years in his eyes.

"The boy has been badly treated, and he can't forget it, Amelia."

"Oh, my dear!" ejaculated Lady Seneschal. She

glanced at her daughter for sympathy. "Badly treated! What nonsense! How many parcels was it we sent out to poor John? Every week, Doctor, every week. And if he didn't get them——"

"Oh, there, there, Amelia; let us not discuss it if you please."

Sir Edward put his hand over his eyes, as if it shut himself out of the company, and Dr. Caldwell sprang up.

"I've already said, Lady Seneschal, that it would be well to leave Sir Edward to rest."

He held open the door for her in so pointed a manner that she found herself walking out, in unconscious docility, at which, once in the corridor, she was both surprised and wroth.

"Upon my word!" she said to Gabie. "I was right, wasn't I? A cool hand. A cool hand. The doctor takes a great deal upon himself. *M. le Docteur prend sur lui!*"

This supposed rendering of her idea in Gallic idiom so took her fancy that she repeated it at intervals for the rest of the evening with restored complacency.

She was, in the main, satisfied with the results of the dangerous first interview; and, upon reflection, irritating as it had been to hear, she began to think that there might be something in her husband's point of view. It was possible that in his refusal to recognize her, to acknowledge her, even to submit to her embrace, the old grievance—undoubtedly poor John had left home with a grievance—might be acting in some way on his muddled wits. He had made no such difficulty with Margaret.

"Of course it can't last," said Lady Seneschal comfortably.

CHAPTER VIII

DR. CALDWELL HANDS OVER HIS CASE

CAN I have a word with you, Dr. Caldwell?" said Sister Blackett, drawing the surgeon into the spacious dressing-room which she had occupied for the night, and ostentatiously shutting the door of communication.

"Certainly, sister, what is it? Captain Seneschal seems to me quite remarkably well this morning." He stopped speaking and glanced impatiently at her dubious face. There had been secret hostility between these two from the beginning. He thought her a goose; every one of his rough ways had been an insult to her gentility. "I am not at all clear," he went on—the thought had just struck him and it was his habit to act quickly—"that I shall leave you here, after me. I want to break all this hospital connection—he'll do better without it. And there's Miss Amber, anyhow."

"Certainly, Dr. Caldwell, I'm quite ready to leave at any moment." She was seized with an acid titter. Her fingers went up trembling to her Mizpah brooch. "I never did undertake to nurse mental cases. I find it very unpleasant and disturbing work."

"Quite so."

She felt the fleer in his glance and in his tone. With a heightened color and a glint of malice in her prominent eyes, "You are satisfied with Captain Seneschal this morning?" she asked and, glancing at the door, went on in a copious whisper: "I hope you'll forgive me, Dr.

Caldwell, for differing from you. I think it is my duty to warn you. You had better look out."

"Look out? What do you mean?"

"Just that. He'll be up to something. He's brewing something. Which train do you wish me to take, Dr. Caldwell?" She spoke sourly.

Lost in deep muse, he stood staring beyond her at the old-fashioned striped wall-paper. She repeated her question in a louder key. With a slight start and an absent "I'll let you know," he strode out of the room, shutting the door noisily behind him.

"Call yourself a doctor!" said Sister Blackett into space, "and no gentleman," she added.

He, who was neither doctor nor gentleman, went downstairs to the breakfast-room, gnawing his upper lip, and knitting his brows. The patient had seemed unusually quiet, self-possessed—in fine, sane, that morning. It had been part of Dr. Caldwell's method with him, up to this, to avoid all vexed questions; he had anticipated having to ward off a scene of reproach and expostulation. There had been none. Captain Seneschal had seemed in the morning to have accepted the situation which he had protested against the night before. But had he? The eye that had met his had been steady; the voice that had answered him had been courteous. Was there nothing behind this unexpected composure? Sick brains could be very subtle. The planning madman could assume a judicial calm that might not misfit a judge. The woman Blackett was a tiresome fool. But women have intuitions. . . .

As he drank his coffee and ate ham and egg and brown bread and marmalade, and let his hostess and Gabrielle chatter on each side of him, unheeding as a dark bowlder

in a dividing stream, he revolved the problem that had defied him in a spirit of ever-increasing, ever more antagonistic determination. He was essentially a surgeon; and the surgeon's bent is necessarily towards the stern and radical. He must revise the treatment.

Sentiment and coaxing are all very well, in their place. Margaret Amber, sitting over there, heavy-eyed, silent—brooding like himself—had a fine, strong character, he was sure; but she was desperately, ludicrously in love. It irritated him to see such magnificent passion wasted on a broken-down fellow. If young Seneschal gave any more trouble it was not by kisses it should be met.

Dr. Caldwell poured himself out a second cup of coffee, and braced his mental energies. At the very end of his mind, unacknowledged, there was the sting of professional vanity; and the anger of one obstinate man against another.

"I'm not going to stand any more nonsense"—that was the sum of his cogitation. In any case, after the forthcoming interview with Dr. Weatherby and the handing over of the case, he was not likely to have time to spare for the individual unsatisfactory patient. In these post-war days there was going to be a great recrudescence of scientific achievement, and the London surgeon meant to be in the forefront.

Dr. Weatherby was a bluff gray-bearded man, with kindly eyes, an obstinate jut of the jaw, and an amount of average commonsense which made him fully able to cope with the average ailments of a country practice. He had, however, a propensity incident to ordinary minds placed by circumstances in authority; what he did not understand he brushed aside. Certain illnesses, in his opinion, produced definite symptoms. Symptoms without

positive illness were "nervous" and, as nervous, to be passed over. That you could have delusions and not be mad or senile, did not enter his system of diagnosis. The moment this fine London practitioner exposed his view of Captain Seneschal's condition, Dr. Weatherby's own conclusion was formed.

"Memory affected, and a fixed idea, but no sign of insanity," expounded Dr. Caldwell.

The country medico stretched his legs, gave vent to a professional "Ah!" and took his beard into his sunburnt hand.

"Yes, yes—I take you. We have found," he expounded with a loud laugh, "a deuce of a lot of scientific names for such a state of affairs, neurasthenia, hyperesthesia and what not. I've had dozens of cases in the Red Cross hospitals. Great, big, strong fellows, crying like children, in a perpetual state of fright; screaming in their sleep, wandering in their waking hours. 'Pon my soul, there are some any one would have said were mad as hatters—not a bit of it, pure hysteria, sir, pure hysteria! Gad, I always treated them for hysteria. Splendid results. Kind, you know, but strict. Ah, you've not been a lady's doctor! I have. Ah, I ought to know something about it after all these years. Coddle a fair patient in hysteria and it's the deuce and all. Why, I've known them begin with a bit of qualm in the throat, or a dizziness, queer feeling somewhere, and end up stiff as pokers. Paralyzed, choking maybe, blue in the face. 'Pon my honor, blue! All because of the fuss that's been made about them. Sir, when I was a young man, a young ass, I treated a young girl for paralysis when all she wanted was a smacking! I know better now. I knew the symptoms the moment I saw the poor lads begin on them. 'Now pull yourself

together,' I'd say. 'None of this here, my good fellow!' The nursing staff had strict orders. We soon knocked what is it you called it, 'the fixed idea,' and all that nonsense out of the ward, I can tell you."

Dr. Caldwell sat, his capable hands hanging loosely between his knees, staring with rounded, attentive eyes at the man who was to be his successor in charge of a peculiar difficulty. He had taken his measure almost from the first words. Perhaps there is no contempt more complete than that of the intelligent medical man for an inferiorly endowed colleague. "But this fool," Dr. Caldwell was saying to himself, "may, after all, do better than I in the business. Anyhow, his ignorance suggests the very treatment I had come to the determination to try."

"Quite so," he said aloud, "you found it to work well. No doubt, hysteria in a ward is as dangerous as an erysipelas germ, and cannot be stamped out too soon or too thoroughly. Now, in Captain Seneschal's case. You have heard the nature of his delusion?"

"Some stuff and nonsense about having buried himself."

"Quite so."

"And in your opinion the poor chap's not mad?"

"Certainly not."

"H'm," said Dr. Weatherby, drawing his beard through his hands. "Sounds a bit nasty, you know, to me. Wound in the head and all that. But, on the other hand," he went on, hurriedly ingratiating, "I'd not presume to doubt your diagnosis after your long observation of him. It is a roaring case of hysteria, then."

"Lack of will-power, there certainly is," said the London man, slowly.

"My dear sir," said the countryman triumphantly, "that is the very source and essence of hysteria. Not only

that, sir, but an inclination of the will towards the simulation of disease. Gad, they like the fuss and the importance! They don't want to be cured. You've got to make 'em control their own morbidity. That is how I take it."

"Quite so. And in Captain Seneschal's case you propose——?"

"To brace him to self-control. To insist on his pulling himself together. To forbid him and those about him, as far as lies in a doctor's authority, to allude to his ridiculous fancies. Give the delusion nothing to feed on and it will die of itself. That would be my treatment, sir!"

"Quite so," said Dr. Caldwell for the fourth time, and he said it approvingly. "Carry that out, Dr. ah—Weatherby. If you can. There is nothing else that requires any special attention, at present. I ordered the bandage off this morning. The wounds are all healed. The patient needs rest, food and fresh air and all that building up after his hardships. I need not further specialize to one of your experience. The only sick part of him is——" he paused, on the point of saying "the brain," but considerately allowed his companion to substitute "the nerves," and merely repeated the words himself:

"The nerves"; adding with his one-sided smile and an irony which he was alone to enjoy, "What a wide field they cover, do they not—Doctor, ah—Weatherby?"

There was a pause; Dr. Weatherby lay back in his chair, pleasantly savoring the consciousness of having, through mere commonsense, distinctly impressed the cock-a-whoop Harley Street fellow.

"I think," said Dr. Caldwell, suddenly, "that Lady Seneschal will thoroughly concur in your views; though

whether you will find her altogether wise in her methods of furthering them——"

Dr. Weatherby flung up both hands and groaned humorously.

"That woman!—How she did not drive them all into a madhouse long ago! She's certainly digging the grave for my poor old friend, Sir Edward, as hard as she can. —Meaning, of course, for the best," cried Weatherby, catching himself back to prudence. "All out of love and devotion. The best-hearted creature in the world!"

"Quite so," said Dr. Caldwell, "a charming person, but a little"—he looked full at his colleague—"nervous, shall we say?"

"Nervous?" echoed the other. Then with irresistible explosion: "Sir, that woman has an iron nerve. She'd wear out a Dreadnought! She's got a constitution"—he paused for a minute, and added, laughing at himself for the choice—"of leather."

"Ah! Dr. Caldwell stretched himself and suppressed a yawn. He looked at his watch, "I have to catch the eleven-forty. I think our young friend ought to be ready by this time. I gave Sister Blackett her instructions. I think I'll touch the bell and get her to bring him down. There are just a few remarks I should like to make to him, in your presence. By the way," he added, after he had pressed the button, wheeling round on one leg and thrusting his hands into his pockets, "I had better mention that I have decided that Captain Seneschal will do better without a nurse; without at least the one who looked after him at my hospital. Undesirable association, and all that. You take me, I see.—Of course," he pulled his hands out of his pockets and looked at his nails, "I don't presume to wish to bias you in any future decision, I am

convinced that I am leaving the patient in the best possible conditions, Doctor, ah—Weatherby."

He smiled absently in the direction of his companion as he spoke. He was washing his hands of a tiresome case, using the least possible soap; he had still to dry them with a rough towel.

Captain Seneschal stepped into the room, unnecessarily helped forward by Sister Blackett.

"I've brought the patient," she remarked.

Dr. Caldwell glowered upon her as she made the equally unnecessary speech; altogether a superfluous goose! If nurses were not so hard to come by these days, he would have sacked her long ago. The Sister paused with an eye on the strange doctor, claiming introduction. But Caldwell dismissed her with a single phrase:

"I'm just telling Dr. Weatherby that you will be leaving this afternoon."

Dr. Weatherby did not even bow. He was engaged in staring at the tall, dark young man, who stood looking from him to Caldwell with eyes in which uneasiness did not altogether cover an underlying fixity of purpose. John had always been unlike the other Seneschal boys, he had turned out dark, with a vengeance. . . . 'Pon honor, thought Weatherby, he had seen many an Indian less so. An ugly scar, that! This war made one believe in miracles. Treated too, in a Turkish prison. Some lads had the devil's own luck, nothing would kill them! And there were poor Eddie and Steve, gone, you might say at the first shot. That young potentate from London was assuming a good deal in referring to his case as a cure, save for the delusion. Why, the boy was worn to thread paper! Emaciated was not the word, and as weak as a cat, too!

"I've just been saying," said Dr. Caldwell, with airy indifference, "that I could not leave you in better hands, than those of your old friend and physician."

Weatherby corroborated the inquiring glance with which this statement was made, with a bluff: "Gad, I vaccinated him!" Then he extended his hand and cried: "Welcome back, Captain John! You haven't forgotten, I hope, your old Esculapius?—No, nor that double tooth I pulled out for you when you marched into my surgery, all alone." He interrupted himself: "Sit down, not up to much standing yet, eh?—No! No?—You've forgotten me, have you? Oh, yes. I've heard. Sequelæ to head wound. It will pass. But, I say," he went on, "that if a fellow forgets such a piece of business as that ten minutes with my forceps, it shows he's got a forgiving disposition—eh, Dr. Caldwell?" His glance sought approval on the great man's face.—"See how I manage him," it seemed to say.—But Dr. Caldwell had no answering look; he was inspecting his nails again, waiting.

As John sat down, Dr. Weatherby followed suit, spreading his broad hands on his knees and possessively contemplating his new patient. John closed his eyes, frowning as if to marshal his thoughts, then he fixed them full, on the gray-bearded face.

"No," he said. "I don't remember anything about you. How could I? You are taking me for another man."

Again the country practitioner glanced at the London one, this time with the mute question: How do *you* meet that? But Caldwell appeared still absorbed in his nails, and Weatherby, feeling suddenly the magnitude of the task, had to administer the necessary check, and felt he was doing it feebly enough. "Come, come, my dear

lad, that's nonsense, you know. We can't allow you to talk such nonsense."

"Look here," said John Tempest suddenly. His hands clenched themselves. "I've made up my mind I'll not give in any more to this damned, damned—cheating! I am not John Seneschal, I know that much, if I don't know my own name. I know that John Seneschal is dead, and that I buried him with these hands."

He flung them out as he spoke, unclenching and shaking them in a passion of certainty that must have carried conviction to minds less prepossessed.

"Ha!" Dr. Caldwell looked up to fix piercing eyes upon his defiant patient. "And what are we to take out of this, pray?"

"You are to take out of it," said the young man between his teeth, returning the intolerably overbearing gaze with one of fierce resentment, "that I will not lend myself to this horrible farce, any more. I thought of that old man's piteous face all night and I, deceiving, lying to him! By God, I'll do it no more! I'll tell him the truth. I think he'll believe me, and help me to get out of this."

Caldwell kept his unflinching stare of authority, unrelaxed.

"Indeed!"

Weatherby's honest elderly countenance became slowly enpurpled.

"Now, look here," said the surgeon. His accents were cold as ice, cutting as the lash of a whip. "I'll have no temper. Listen to me. Listen to me, I say! Until you remember who you are, young man, you will be John Seneschal to every one. And why? Because there is overwhelming evidence that you are John Seneschal. Be-

cause you have yourself, time and again, furnished irrefragable proof of your identity. You are under a delusion. Thousands of men wounded as you are have delusions. Some get well, some end in—well, some don't get well, and have to be treated accordingly.—Hear me out!" He made a warning gesture, and John checked the angry speech that sprang to his lips. "I am handing you over to your own people, and placing you in the charge of your own doctor. But I have not quite done with you yet. Now give me your attention, please. I won't repeat what I am going to say: I will act on it. You stay here quietly. Pull yourself together, call up your will power, and never as much as think again of that bit of babbling folly, 'John Seneschal is dead!' and you'll recover. If you don't, as true as I am standing here before you, I'll have to modify my opinion of your case. It will be my duty to have you sent away to a home where people who cherish such delusions as yours are looked after till they get rid of them."

Into John's eyes, as he stared up at the speaker, came terror mingled with wrath.

"You threaten me with"—he began in tense low voice. "If you think that you can force me by threats—oh, I know I'm muddled! But I've got one thing clear. I've got to put myself straight with that old man—I've got——"

But before he could finish his phrase the door burst open, and Lady Seneschal rushed into the room, as if with sails spread to a gale. Her delicate face was scarlet.

"You wicked boy!" she screamed. "I have been listening. I have heard you.—Go to your father, go to your father—And I'll have you shut up!—Hold your

tongue, Weatherby. You've no business to interfere. You're paid for writing prescriptions and ordering pows and pilders, not for dictating to me, interfering with my private concerns!—I say John, I say Dr. Caldwell, I say Weatherby, that, if he's mad he must be shut up. If he isn't mad he must behave himself! Yes, I know, you've been telling him all this, Dr. Caldwell. I've heard you. But you're so mealy-mouthed. He must be made to understand, must be made to understand. If he will behave like a lunatic, he must go to a lunatic asylum. I'll pop him in one myself! I don't care what it costs. There's a place near Edinburgh—oh, you know, Caldwell, you know, you know. All the young dukes are there. He'll be in good society——"

The laugh with which she accompanied these words gave a more sinister impression of her fury than even her first peacock shriek. Dr. Caldwell looked from the mænad figure of the mother to the set countenance of him whom he believed to be the son. He was keenly interested in the scene. Was this only a vile-tempered woman; or, in spite of her asseverations at their first meeting, was there not actual insanity in the family? If so, he might have to surrender all his diagnosis of John Seneschal's case. But Lady Seneschal's next words were such as, in his opinion, more clearly indicated the temper theory—temper and an egoism that had something quite appalling in it, even to one who was by temperament and experience, inclined to cynicism.

"You needn't look at me like that, John; no, nor set your jaw at me! I mean what I say. You'll have to give in, my young man, or you'll have to be shut up. I'll not have father killed by you! I'll not be turned out, with your sister, an hour sooner than necessary. You take

my word for it. Father can't live long, I know. And" —her voice rose to a shriller virulence—"just because of the maggot in your brain I'll not have your sister's prospects blighted, and my jointure interfered with—and that dreadful Teddy, that rotter, and his abominable wife swaggering at Thornbarrow!—You know the Seneschal arrangement, Weatherby, as well as I do! You know the mother of the heir has an extra thousand a year. I'll keep my thousand. Gabie and I are not going to starve because of that young looney's obstinacy. It is obstinacy. He always was obstinate. Obstinate and wicked. An obstinate, sullen, tiresome boy!"

She paused for want of breath. John lay back in his chair and closed his eyes. In a glance Dr. Caldwell knew by the sudden furrowing of the features that one of those blind attacks of pain to which men with head-wounds are long liable had come upon his patient, "And no wonder!" he thought.

Weatherby and he exchanged a look, as the lady broke out anew. How could any mere man deal with such a virago? Yet she was, after all, but carrying out his own revised treatment, if somewhat crudely. The fellow was obstinate. Caldwell's gaze upon the drawn face held no compassion.

"Don't think I can't manage it. Father can be told any taradiddle—that you've got to have a new operation—that Caldwell's carrying you back to his hospital —that you've got to be kept in a dark room, quiet—anything! Father need never know. Since he's got to die in a few months anyhow, you know he's got to die, Weatherby—oh, I've no patience with you, frowning and turning up your eyes! He's got to die, there's no use

blinking facts—senty siclamentality I call it!—" she stammered on the transposed syllables and suddenly fell silent, gasping. Through the door left open, Margaret had walked into the room.

CHAPTER IX

MARGARET TAKES MATTERS IN HER OWN HANDS

MARGARET came straight to John, took his hand, and looked round with blazing eyes upon the group.

"What are you all doing to him?" she cried. And then, "What are they doing to you, John?"

The change in her voice from anger to the utmost tenderness was, Dr. Caldwell thought, a beautiful thing to hear. He had already noticed the golden quality of that voice. "My God, how she loves him!" he said to himself. And again something gross and envious uprose in him; what a waste of a glorious passion!

The soldier raised his eyes upon her.

"Why, you've been torturing him!"

She came behind his chair and laid both her hands upon his shoulders. Once again she was fulminating. She was as a lioness over her cub, Caldwell thought. Then he spoke:

"I assure you, Miss Amber, that I have Captain Seneschal's interests at heart, quite as much as those of his family, in endeavoring to restrain him from going to his dying father in his present mood."

"I have no father. And even this—oh, above all, this—is wrong!"

John Tempest raised his hand and tried to lift Margaret's touch from his shoulders.

"John!"—She came quickly round and knelt beside him.

"I am not John Seneschal. I am——"

"Oh, don't, darling! Don't try and strain to remember." The suffering, mental and physical, in his accents was echoed in hers. "Did we not settle it between us? You are just John, and I am Margaret."

She took both his hands in hers and held them tightly clasped. Slowly, as if unwillingly, his eyes turned upon her; then with a long sigh, his whole frame relaxed, his head fell on his breast. In that mute action the spirit of honor, fighting in the disabled frame, laid down its weapon. For the moment, it was surrender, complete.

"Promise me," said Margaret after a pause, "that you will let me think for you till you can think for yourself, that you will let me judge for you till you can judge for yourself. I will not ask you to do anything wrong. Ah, you believe that! But I do tell you that you must not go to Sir Edward with this story of uncertainty——"

Lady Seneschal, disregarding with a toss of the head, Dr. Caldwell's warning frown, here intervened again, stammering over her words in her determination to get them spoken before she could be stopped.

"Make him give you his word of honor that he will let his father die in peace, Margaret, Margaret, do you hear! Make him give his word. Pledge himself. His word of honor, as a gentleman—gentleman!"

Margaret rose to her feet. She was splendid in wrath as she turned to gaze on her old enemy over John Tempest's prone head.

"Her eyes are positively flaming green! The lioness will spring in a minute!" Caldwell was watching, more interested in this psychological drama than his materialism would have admitted. John let his head fall against the back of his chair and closed his eyes.

"Margaret," he said, faintly but distinctly, "what you tell me to do, I will do."

"Why then, my darling"—again the rare endearment fell from her lips with more than a lover's yearning, with the ache of a mother's tenderness in it—"why then, yes, I do tell you; let Sir Edward die in peace."

"Make him give his word of honor. Now is our chance! You fool, Margaret, you fool!"

"It is you who are a fool," said Margaret in a low voice. "Oh, will you never understand? What John has said, he will do. Please leave us, all of you."

Lady Seneschal snorted. It was the second time that she had been turned out in this manner in her own house: Margaret was taking a great deal upon herself! While she sought for words with which to rebuke, without alienating the heiress, Dr. Caldwell intervened:

"Dr. Weatherby," said he, "just take Lady Seneschal out of this, will you?—You had really better go, Lady Seneschal. Do not spoil a good morning's work. As for me, I must be off too, in a few minutes. The car ought to be round soon. See you, in the hall, before I start—ah, Weatherby—and shut the door, there's a good fellow."

He had already discovered that Lady Seneschal could be momentarily cowed by a surprise attack. As the door now closed upon her protesting exit: "Cheek, upon my word—I say cool cheek!" He himself lingered surveying Margaret with an intent look. She had again taken her lover's hands.

"Well," he said, with an effort after his usual clear out professional manner, "I leave the patient in good care, anyhow.—Good-bv. Miss Amber. You'll write to me."

Margaret gave him a fugitive glance. It was full of contempt, indifference and dislike—even the simplest woman can fling such a shaft from her armory.

"Thank you," she said, "if I want your help."

He knew then that his own irritable resolve of a little while ago was destined to be carried out, that the tiresome case was to pass altogether out of his keeping. He gave a short laugh.

"Give him an aspirin," he said, slightingly. "Good-by, Miss Amber."

"Good-by."

Margaret did not seem to see the outstretched hand. Her lids were cast down—what unusually long dark eyelashes she had! They positively swept the fruit bloom of her cheek! He shrugged his shoulders, laughed again and went away at his quick stride, more angry, more snubbed, more discomfited than he had ever known himself in his successful career.

As he drove away in the car the image of Margaret Amber's vivid charming face, the ardent absorption of her air, the strong tenderness of her clasping hands, rose again and again before him; and each time he was stung. He would have liked to have held that hand in his once more. He looked down at his own palm and knew with a fiery sense of being balked that it would probably never feel that desired touch again.

"There were a good many 'fools' flying about in the air, a little while ago," he said cynically to himself, "and, by the Lord, I am one of the lot! Any other surgeon would have operated that fellow for brain pressure. And if he had died, it would have been a good thing for everybody all round."

The door closed. Margaret relinquished her hold of

John and got up. As she stood looking down at him, she saw that physical pain had the upper hand of everything. She gazed upon the knitted tormented brow with its great scar, at the worn face set in endurance, and tears welled to her eyes. A poignant comparison struck her. John, her John!—that look on his face was like nothing so much as the look on the ivory Christ of the Spanish Crucifix in her mother's dressing-room—sole token of the religion which the South American mother had brought with her into the household of the millionaire Amber!

Margaret had never troubled much about creeds, either her own or other people's. Her father's opinions were, like himself, stern and keen on certain principles, large and generally indifferent on all else. And if she inclined to a like agnosticism, it was because she had from early childhood found that he was an infinitely kinder and safer person to live with than her freakish, frivolous once-Catholic mother. It was her mother's rich southern blood that ran in her veins and colored her youthful face; it was her father's spirit, strong, straight-aiming, that colored her mind. But that crucifix emblem of a faith of which she knew nothing had always arrested her attention in a singular manner. She had felt that, to those who knew and believed, here was embodied something—immense, at once, and exquisite—far beyond any natural thought or human conception. Each time she looked at it, it was as if a fine blade struck into a secret depth of her soul: an inexplicable pain! Against which folly her commonsense always instantly reacted.

And now, on the face of her beloved, the look of the dying Christ!

The blade ran in; and the pang did not pass. In the

grip of it, she had a confused yet rending realization of the sanctity of suffering. John's weakness and pain suddenly assumed a majesty before which she could have knelt. She had meant, the moment they were alone, to tell him something of her great unchanging love; to call upon him; to make him feel, lips against lips, that nothing mattered, since they were John and Margaret. But now she could not. His helplessness, his hurt of mind and body, claimed reverence; claimed a devotion infinitely purer, more holy, than the self-indulging expression of her woman's love. She would not lay as much as a caressing finger upon that disfigured brow which she had seen in her soul as crowned with thorns.

"Give him an aspirin," Dr. Caldwell had said. The advice had been flung at her with a fleer, nevertheless it was sound. Margaret knew that, now, as his sole nurse, she ought to administer a cachet and make John lie down for the rest of the day.

He let himself be led upstairs with a docility that wrung her heart. She could do anything with him; she felt that, and was glad and sorry at the same time. It made things easy, yet it was piteous.

At the door of his room—the room that had been John Seneschal's—he suddenly stopped and put his hand to his forehead.

"There is something I have to give you. I said to myself, this morning, that I must be sure and give it to you. I cannot remember, now!"

"John, dear, never mind."

"I must, I must!"

His hands moved uncertainly about his pockets.

Then, gripping his breast, "Ah, I know, it's here!" His wan face cleared. "It's here!"

She gave a cry, when she saw him draw it from over his heart where it had lain—the pocketbook which had been her gift.

"John Seneschal's pocketbook," he said huskily, and held it out to her.

She thrust it from her in a passionate refusal.

"Ah, no, no! Don't give it back to me!—John, oh, John, don't ask me to take it back, I can't bear it!"

"Your picture is there."

"I know."

"I could not bury that, you know. I could not bury that! I could not bury you with John Seneschal."

"No.—No, darling. I understand." She was forcing the battered letter case into his pocket as she spoke. "Keep it. I give it to you again. You understand what it means. I give you so much with it all over again. Keep it or you'll break my heart!"

He flung her a look of doubt. His forehead was all knotted with pain—pain of the spirit as well as of the flesh.

"What you tell me to do, I must do!" he cried then; and, plucking at his heart where the pocketbook lay, as if the thing burned him, wheeled about and staggered into his room.

The door was shut so quickly that she dared not follow him. She waited a moment, listening; heard him pull open and close a drawer, and guessed that he had cast her present into it. Then the bed creaked—he must have cast himself upon it. Then she heard him groan.

"Oh, my poor boy! My poor troubled boy!" she

lamented within herself. But, no, it was not the time for tears.

Sister Blackett would not leave till the afternoon. She must seek her now, and take her instructions from her and secure that aspirin for John.

BOOK II

CHAPTER X

JOHN TEMPEST DOUBTS

SIR EDWARD looked up at Dr. Weatherby, and this excellent man, though it took a good deal to shake his optimism, thought that he had never seen more sadness written on any human countenance. He repeated the statement he had just made, therefore, in a louder tone of conviction:

" 'Pon my word, I am only saying the truth. I've seldom seen a young fellow pick up so quickly. Why he's not the same boy he was this time last week when that fine London gentleman left him with us."

"He is certainly stronger," said the father, slowly. Then with a sudden explosion in which irritation made but a poor cover to an aching heart: "I can't get anything out of him. He won't speak. He sits there, glum——"

"He—oh, come, come, Sir Edward!" Dr. Weatherby pulled a chair forward and noisily stirred the beech logs that smoldered on the sick man's hearth. "Come, Sir Edward—you don't get much heat out of this; why don't they look after you better?—You must give the lad time. We've all told you there has been a loss of memory after the head wound. You can't expect——"

"I expect a little natural feeling: I expect some show of regret for his brothers——" Sir Edward's voice trembled and he broke off. "Loss of memory!—The fact is

—he's remembering too well! We have treated him badly, and he can't forget or forgive."

"Oh, now, that's fancy. That's morbid."

Sir Edward had a faint, sour smile.

"You're like my lady. She says it's balderdash."

"Ha, ha!" Dr. Weatherby's big laugh rang out with forced heartiness.

"Weatherby," said his patient solemnly, "I am not blaming John. He is doing his best. I see him sit as you are sitting now, and look at me, and I assure you there's the most dreadful misery in his eyes. He looks as if he were longing to be able to, to—oh, good God! find a word of affection, and he can't. I've killed his love for me, and that's the truth. And he comes, gentle and anxious—polite, oh, polite! and has not a word for me beyond a 'I hope you are better, sir.' Sir! Not once, father!—Those two——" His bloodless fingers fluttered toward the writing table. "It was 'dad' with them, and 'good old dad,' and 'dear old dad,' and 'the best of dads' all the time. Aye, Weatherby, in my Steve's last letter, it is there, it is there: 'Whatever happens, you've been the best of dads.' There's no grammar, or sense in the phrase, you'll say. I daresay not, but all my dear boy was in it. My loving child!"

Weatherby coughed and poked the fire again, discomfited, as your good-natured, every-day man will be, when brought face to face with a sorrow, the profundity of which is altogether outside his comprehension.

"Come, you know," he said, staring at the red logs to avoid the sight of that ravaged face, "you must not take things like that! Edward and Stephen——" the doctor cleared his throat—"*dulce et decorum*, and all the rest of it, you know. I needn't say it to you, eh? And you've

got one of them back. Gad, that ain't too bad. Why, there are five houses in this end of the county alone where there's been a clean sweep of the boys!"

Sir Edward was shading his eyes with his skeleton hand. He, too, stared into the fire. Time was when he had wept his boys; and times, too, there had been when he had wept with joy to know that one of his blood had been spared to him. But since that one's return had come a new phase. Sorrow had deepened to a sort of dry despair; and joy—a tremulous agonized joy it had been at the best—had taken fright, scared as it were, by some strange and ever-increasing atmosphere of disappointment and craving.

He tried, now, to press the thought home how it would have been with him had that telegram—so carefully laid within reach on the little table—never come to tell him that his last son, wounded and missing, had been found. Instantly a whiff arose from the nethermost pit of misery which he had hung over seven dreadful weeks; it turned him sick and giddy.

"God forbid I should complain!" he cried in a cracked voice of fear that made the doctor jump. "God forbid I should be ungrateful for the favor vouchsafed me! No, no, Weatherby, I can face my death now, and know that there will be peace for me in the grave, and that Thornbarrow and the good name are in honest hands.—You know what the fellow is who would come in here had John not been given back. You know the fellow—Seneschal-Smith! He'd drop the Smith pretty quick, when he got to Thornbarrow. Do you know he's married a girl out of the music-hall. The fellow is not a gentleman. Hang it all, the father was bad enough—I cut him, cut him dead, Weatherby.—A gambler, a spendthrift, a rake.

I would not have him about the place with my wife and my young children—but he was a gentleman. This fellow—the son, the young man, I thought it my duty to send for him when—when we didn't know our last boy had escaped. And I tell you the mere sight of him was enough for me."

Sir Edward leaned forward his own high-bred countenance, a mask of disgust. "Think of the creature, in the shoes of my lads. Think of him at Thornbarrow.—No, no, God forbid I should complain!"

"Ah," cried Weatherby, straightening himself and returning with relief from the melancholy which the conversation had demanded to his usual joviality. "John's a fine manly boy, if he does sit and brood a bit; and as for that nice girl he's going to marry——"

Here Sir Edward brightened visibly. The Doctor had hit at last upon the one real piece of unalloyed happiness which life still held for him.

"Aye—Margaret! She's a fine creature. She's a noble creature. Margaret will be grand mistress of Thornbarrow one of these days. And as for John, have you noticed it? He's like another man when she's with him. We treated her badly, too, my lady and I. But she bears no grudge. She's forgiven me.—We had a talk last night, and she comforted me, Weatherby, she comforted me very much."

The invalid paused, and then flung a tentative glance at the man who, without being a friend, had become an intimate through long association. "She thinks that John's odd way with me don't mean—well, what I thought, what I've just told you. She thinks he's just dazed with all the hardships. 'My poor lad! he's dazed'—those were her words. 'Remember Kut,' she said, 'and the rest.'

You can't wonder! Poor lad! he never speaks of it, that's fine!—I suppose I expect too much, but I haven't so very much time. You all say 'Give him time,' but I haven't so very much time to give, have I?"

He had a wistful smile, and Dr. Weatherby, as he rose, cleared his throat noisily to hide a renewal of emotion.

"Pooh, pooh—what nonsense! The fine weather's coming. We'll have you out of doors in the bath chair as soon as summer sets in. And John wheeling you about, too, as strong as a horse himself. You will be able to show him the trees you want cut down, and all that.—Well, I'll just take a look at Master John before I toot away. What? He's out with Miss Amber, is he? Capital! I'll keep that look till next week then.—So long! Go on with the new drops, Sir Edward.—Ah, and get them to make you better fires. A chill, you know, would be the very deuce!"

As he nodded and stumped away he was glad to think of the busy rounds before him and the fine blow he would get across the Cranbourne moors. He was not a perceptive man; but the dying father's piteous craving for some show of affection which the son's delusion (poor, young crazy-pate!) would not let him show, struck even him as peculiarly tragic.

"'Pon my word," thought the good man, "people may say what they like, that beastly war has a lot to answer for!"

John Tempest, innocent intruder, unwilling usurper of his dead comrade's home, honors, hopes, and love, having placed his will between the hands of Margaret Amber, entered upon a strange traject of peace. And in that

traject, health came back to him; vigor of muscle and sinew. His nights were restful, his days were filled with growing content. Yet memory still remained a blank, save for two gleams of certainty: The burial of one John Seneschal under a dreadful sunshine; the face and name of one Margaret, too beautiful to be laid in the grave with him! These were as flashes painted in vivid color across his dark sky.

Other glimmers there were, but mysterious and vague as summer lightning, that quivered, showed elusive distances, and were gone. These were all connected with Thornbarrow, the place he had learned to know, unseen, in hours forgotten.

He began to take his position in the household as if in truth he had been their own; though it would be more exact to say he accepted passively what was forced upon him. He suffered Lady Senescal's maternal interferences and Gabrielle's perfunctory show of sisterly affection with the indifferent air of many a young Englishman who is frankly bored by family demonstrations. He sat a dutiful hour once a day with Sir Edward. After the first days, the elder man had dropped all attempt to touch on intimate things; the conversation then was all on estate affairs, past, present and future; and it was Sir Edward that did most of the talking.

The father will, as a rule, find little fault in the attitude of the heir who listens to his instructions without protruding any ideas of his own and docilely agrees to every suggestion, but, to both, these meetings remained an undiminished trial. Never yet had John Tempest said to himself: "I might, after all, be John Seneschal—and how much easier, if I could give way, and try to believe it!"

His darkened brain could produce no proof beyond the one deeply stamped conviction, that he was not the man for whom they all took him; for whom there was such ardent and piteous reason that he should be taken. Against this single impression there were a hundred contrary testimonies, great and small. But, tossed on the dark waves, this single spar upheld him. It seemed to him that if he let go his grasp upon it, all that was good in him would go too, honor, rectitude, honesty. Yet, since fate and Margaret were too strong for him, he would play the part. The peace of the dying man must be maintained.

John Tempest was a very bad actor. Indeed how could he help being a bad actor—was he not like one who has had a part thrust upon him in an unrehearsed play? Perhaps the blankness of his memory helped him more than he realized, since it removed all necessity for pretense. Certain glades of Thornbarrow, certain names of old servants were known to him, vaguely or vividly as his brain had retained the pictures which John Seneschal had drawn for him during that forgotten comradeship. Each time, then, he seemed thus to remember or recognize, another little link in the chain that bound him was forged. So it went on, and he grew in some measure familiarized to the fantastic existence.

Too rarely was the barrier of constraint broken down between him and Sir Edward, though now and again some leap of mutual sympathy, some response out of John's pity to the sick man's longing, brought them into momentary contact. These were moments cherished by Sir Edward in the long wakeful watches of the night; but they remained as dead weights on John's heart. He had

no right to the look of love or the murmured blessing, the claiming touch of the chilled fingers.

It was only with Margaret that his spirit was at rest, that the dogging of conscience, like muffled steps in the dark, found a surcease. There was no deception between him and Margaret; he had laid bare his soul, rending the veil as far as he could, before her. She had accepted him with his doubt; with wide-open eyes she had looked upon his torment, and chosen the path for him; chosen to walk along it beside him—"Just John, just Margaret." There was no question of acting a part with her, it was her command that he should drift. The moment he found himself in her company her will became law to him, his only possible right.

As for Margaret, she could as soon have denied the beating of her own heart as doubted that it was her one lover who had come back to her. Creature of single passion as she was, every energy of her being was concentrated upon her recovered treasure. Eight years of separation had but intensified, deepened and strengthened what had grown with her growth. All that she had suffered in secret through their separation; all the agony she had gone through when she had known him in pain and peril, in want and bondage, was only so much added tenderness to expend upon him now. She had so much in her heart for him, such ardors of dedication, such accumulation of devotedness, that his very disabilities were but the opportunity for her generous affection. To give and give; this was her joy! There was no place for doubt, therefore there was no room for regret in such self-dedication. Every time his eyes looked upon her, she saw content chase trouble from them. With every instinct of her woman's nature she knew that, though his strange

obsession kept him from expressing his love, he was each moment more profoundly attached to her. She knew that she was as the breath of life to him.

As Dr. Weatherby's car hurtled down the avenue, blatantly tooting, John and Margaret seated side by side on the great Barrow watched its flying course and then smiled at each other with the satisfaction of lovers who have saved their sacred hour uninterrupted.

"Isn't it a blessing?" said Margaret. "I do hate doctors!"

John turned his eyes upon her; the beautiful limpid eyes which redeemed his olive face from its un-English look. English hazel eyes they were, and Margaret, gazing into them, thought that no man, save this John Seneschal, had ever looked at her with a gaze so true, steady and pure.

"Ah," she said aloud, following her thoughts, "the lady in the gallery has eyes as opaque as brown velvet. That's what spoils her."

"You mean the Spanish ancestress," said John quickly, with one of his flickers of memory.

She nodded eagerly, pleased, as she always was at the least token of recovery; but the rich color of her cheek faded a little, as he went on, dreamily: "The great great ever so far back grandmother . . . whom John Seneschal was supposed to take after!" Of all things she must not start the old fruitless discussion!

"Yes, John," she said in as everyday a manner as possible, and would not meet his glance, though she knew it was questioning her upon the edge of the ever haunting trouble.

She was almost glad of the interruption when a high, clear voice hailed them from the bottom of the slope.

Seated in a bath chair, drawn by an aged donkey, Gabrielle had just emerged from the black shadow of a copse.

"John!—Margaret! There you are!" Lady Seneschal and her daughter were of those who never omit the unnecessary phrase. "There you are, both together! I am going to fetch granny for a turn. And mother says, father says, John must go and see granny. And mother says, father says, he's horrified John has never been yet. Mother says, father says, it's a want of respect. And mother says, you'd better come too, Margaret."

Margaret's momentary relief was swamped in a new wave of apprehension. As she got up from the Barrow, John did so likewise; and she saw that he was still looking questionably at her, the fret of the problem growing in his eyes.

"You don't remember granny?" she said gently.

He shook his head.

"Nothing about her at all?"—Again he shook his head. —"Oh, John, think! Not the old lodge among the oak trees? And the black paneled dining-room where we used to have quince-jelly?—And Prince—don't you remember Prince?"

She had broken through her rule, she did not know why. He was following her words with the intentness of a child. Suddenly his pondering gaze lightened:

"Prince!" he said, "the old white Pom, and the row there was when Hod nearly killed him."

"Ah!—you do remember!"

As her face became radiant his own darkened. He brushed his hand across his forehead with the familiar gesture of distress.

"Some one must have told me."

"Oh, John, who could have told you every intimate detail like this? Don't you see it's your own past coming back to you by degrees?—One or two things you might have heard, but to recognize, to know so much as you do, you must have lived it all."

John Tempest stood, lost in profound self-communing. For the first time he found himself able to collate the few facts which emerged in his mind from the impenetrable past and to draw reasonable conclusions from them. Up to this the mere effort of memory had sufficed to bring back the complete paralysis of his thinking power.

"I know I buried John Seneschal," he was saying to himself; "therefore we were comrades. All the things I seem to remember, he must have told me." He wheeled round, upon the impulse, to speak these words aloud to Margaret; but, even as he opened his lips, he closed them again. Pain shot through him, the greatest he had ever suffered, perhaps!

Her straight, lithe figure was outlined against the pure blue of the May sky as she stood on the edge of the Barrow; the sunshine fell fiercely on her richly tinted face and showed no flaw in it. That was the face which had already burned itself into his heart from the cold black and white of a picture. Now, in its living force, its noble strength and passion, it was turned upon him, breathing love, deep-gazing eyes, parted lips quivering tenderness—all for him!

It was literally true that he could not speak the words which would strike this glowing reality from his path. The next moment, clearness passed from his mental vision; he drew back into the labyrinth. Was it not true, as Margaret said, that these scenes, capriciously familiar,

these small episodes of the past, unexpectedly leaping in his mind, were to him as things lived?

Thus, paradoxically, from his first genuine illumination was born his first yielding to doubt. Might it not be the most rational explanation that he was John Seneschal after all? Did not every pulse in his being testify to his love for Margaret? And was it not folly to think of such love as a mere sudden infatuation? It was part of himself. He could not but feel that he had always loved her. And she?—Was it possible that she, pure and straight and clear-minded, should pass on to a stranger, an impostor, the consecrated ardors of her whole life? Oh, God, to speak those annihilating words would be more cruel than to strike her dead as she gazed love upon him; it would be the murder of all golden sunlight and spring promise, the calling up of the blacks mists of hell!

Serenely unconscious of the silent drama which was rending John's soul and which Margaret felt piercingly without understanding, Gabrielle, with chirrups and little impatient cries began to hustle them along with her. Chucking the reins and interspersing conversation with the epithets appropriate to a donkey, she kept up a brisk chatter as she led the way across the downland toward King Henry's Lodge. With the perverseness of his kind the donkey persisted in taking the advance, so Miss Seneschal's remarks had to be addressed over her shoulder, and it was with curves and gambits, and occasional encounters with gorse bushes that the ancient bath chair pursued its bumping course.

John paid no more heed to her twitter than if it had dropped from the light-winged finches that skimmed about their path, after their companionable fashion. He was wont to oppose silence to mother and daughter; moreover,

just now, his mind was concentrated upon the new thought which held such tremendous possibility for him. Margaret flung a random answer from time to time, until the needless prattle took a turn which stung her to attention.

Gabrielle hoped to goodness granny would not be quite so awful about John as she was yesterday.

"She was, my dear, oh well, oh there!—Tchk, tchk, Toby! no, you can't eat gorse!—Isn't it funny how they like gorse? Do you know that horses and foals grow beards when they eat gorse?—Where was I?—Well, as I was saying, granny was too awful yesterday. Sometimes I think she does it on purpose."

"Does what on purpose?" asked Margaret. She was breasting the long slope with her free stride, one steadying hand on the bath chair.

"Oh, my dear, her dottiness! I'm sure I'm glad John's coming to see her at last. I'm quite sick of explaining things to her.—Tchk, Toby! Hup, you rascal!—How we were afraid you were dead, John, and how wonderfully you've come back. But she will have it that you've been back months and that she sees you every day and you're as well as possible, and she won't believe you've been wounded, or in prison, or anything. I declare she's as bad as you are, only the other way round!"—Gabrielle's laugh tinkled as she shot him a taunting glance. "I think she does it for contrariness. She isn't half as cracked as she pretends. And you know, Margaret, you know she never really did care for John—not like poor Eddie or Steve. Goodness knows what started this nonsense in her head. I say I'm quite sick of explaining: 'You couldn't have seen John, granny. John has been very ill. John's not been himself at all; he's only just begun to crawl about!' It isn't a bit of use.—Last night I put my foot

in it. . I couldn't help saying, after about the hundredth time: 'You see, granny dear, it's just a fancy of yours —just a kind of delusion.' And she got awfully angry and said I'd be telling her, next, she was out of her mind! And then she was too comical, for she said she had always thought there was something wanting in me. *In me!*" Gabrielle shrilled with laughter. "My goodness—then there'd be three of us—I mean—I——" She caught herself up and cried, laughing still, but with a mirth that was this time rather forced: "Of course I don't mean that."

Margaret flung a furious glance at the slim back, then anxiously looked at John. His face was thoughtful, but not distressed, and, their eyes meeting, he smiled.

"Oh, my God," prayed Margaret with a leaping heart, "is it coming at last—the lifting of the cloud?"

But, in his mind, he was telling himself that he would make of this visit a kind of test. If the old woman knew him—she who was already on the borderland—if her wandering wits recognized him as bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, might he not accept the verdict?

Flicking reins and brandishing whip, Gabrielle pursued gayly.

"Of course, as mother says, it is high time for oracular demonstration. I said to mother: 'You mean ocular.' But mother said, 'It's all the same, you know what I mean.' And, of course, you must be prepared; she won't know you, Margaret."

"I shan't mind that," said Margaret, and then she cried, rather quickly to John, who was marching dreamily along on the other side of the chair, "And you mustn't mind, John, if she doesn't know you. She probably still thinks of you as you were at eighteen."

He gave a little start and for all reply cast a wistful

glance at her. Gabrielle took up the note in her bird-like way.

"I don't know, I don't know. I wouldn't say that. As mother says, that's the one thing about granny, she never muddles us up. Mother says, granny knows her own."

"Oh, Gabrielle," thought Margaret, "it's you that ought to be harnessed to that bath chair."

CHAPTER XI

THE DOWAGER PRONOUNCES

KING HENRY'S LODGE, so oddly set on the downs, without even a garden enclosure, or as much (as old Lady Seneschal's cook was wont to complain) as a patch where a Christian could cut herself a cabbage, wore its floral decoration only in the big stone vases that reared themselves, in rows of three, each side of the flat porch. In these vases, now, the double yellow tulips were a little past their prime, but still lovely with seared petals growing pink at the edges; forget-me-nots and aubretia pushed between them and dripped over the stone rims. The ancient house, with the warm sunshine upon it, had a friendly look. The oaks, so twisted, lichen-covered and aged of limb, so glorious in the bronze sheen of their young foliage, made a fairy tale background to a place of legendary hauntings, traditions and memories.

Margaret greedily watched her lover's face, hoping to see it light up with remembrance, as she had seen it light up before the great Barrow and other special scenes of their childish games. But it remained impassive, as if he were too much intent upon an absorbing inward speculation to notice the outside world at all.

"Tchk, tchk, Toby!" cried Gabrielle for the fiftieth time. "No, you can't eat the tulips, you old fool! Margaret, John, will one of you ring the bell? I don't think I'd better let go of the reins."

Before either could obey, the door was opened and a

small procession appeared. The butler, genteelly carrying a rug, the nurse attendant laden with hot water bottle, air cushions, shawls and footstool, in the rear, leaning on the arm of a younger maid the old lady herself, majestic always, but now enveloped with added majesty amid the folds of her black satin cloak, under the crown of her black satin poke bonnet. This last, awe-striking piece of millinery was adorned with a black lace veil which floated cornerwise at each side and fell in a long point at the back. The dowager would no more have issued forth from her hall door without those insignia of state than the Pope of Rome officiate without the triple tiara.

Pausing on the threshold, she looked beyond Gabrielle to her companions with what can only be described as a glare. Uninvited guests were regarded as intruders by her, even at ordinary hours of calling; but that any one should impinge the sacred privacy of her morning constitutional was a piece of audacity almost beyond belief.

"Oh, how are you, granny? Had a good night, I hope. Mother thought you'd like a turn in the donkey chair. Such lovely sunshine! And oh, granny, here's John—John, granny!—Here's John, you know. Oh, you've heard all about it, so I needn't go over it all again! You've only got to look at him, he speaks for himself."

Gabrielle's laugh rang out with just the faintest quaver of nervousness in it for Granny's eye was not encouraging. It had something in it of the hard, sly cruelty of a parrot's.

"Here are John and Margaret," the girl proceeded sharply, into the deadliness of the pause that ensued. "John is engaged to Margaret, you know."

The old lady's stare was for a moment deflected in

Miss Amber's direction; then it returned, with a force which made of it almost a missile, to John Tempest.

"Who are you?" she asked, in her deep voice.

It was her usual disconcerting formula with every visitor, no matter how familiar, who was not of her blood, to be followed generally, after explanation, by the equally disconcerting question, "Do I know you?"

Visitors laughed and were good-humored, even if a little nettled. But, upon the group in the sunshine to-day, there fell a paralyzing discomfiture. The good-natured female, who was half hospital nurse, half bullied maid, winked, nodded, and shook her head behind her patient's back, to indicate that no attention should be paid to the maundering of senility. The while she shot furtive, compassionate glances at the pale young officer, who, it was known, was himself none too sound in the head—to see how he took such a greeting.

Gabrielle plucked at the donkey's reins, thought how tiresome it all was, and consoled herself in her hard, light little soul, by remembering that granny couldn't go on much longer, thank goodness! Margaret's heart was full of wrath at the stupidity which had exposed John to so unnecessary an ordeal. She hardly dared turn her eyes upon him. It was to every one's surprise that he suddenly stepped forward, and bareheaded, with a lift of the chin as if to bring his countenance more fully to the light, addressed the formidable old lady:

"Look at me. Don't you remember me?"

Margaret caught her breath. Here was a new voice. Had the change come so swiftly, and by what treachery of fate was he now passionately seeking recognition of the one creature whose crazy caprice it would be to deny it?

The Dowager stiffened herself, rearing the frame which shook only with age. Clutching her stick, she was silent; every energy centered in the eyes that condemned and rejected.

"Who are you?" she said again at last.

John fell back and Margaret, taking his cold hand in hers, sought vainly for a single word of balm or counsel. Gabrielle and the butler spoke simultaneously.

"Oh, granny," exclaimed the girl, "I do believe you're doing it on purpose!" Her accents were fretful, and there was a more genuine feeling in the old servant's shocked tones of rebuke.

"It's Master John, my lady, Captain Seneschal, I should say. Your ladyship's own grandson, given back, so to speak by a dispensation, from the dead."

"I don't know you," said the dowager, disregarding these remarks with a massive arrogance.

"You don't know me, either, I suppose?"

Margaret left John's side and came forward in her turn. Her eyes were flashing, her cheeks, by nature so admirably glowing, drained of color. With the malicious acuteness of the senile the old woman saw the trap and became abnormally alert.

"I know *you* very well, my dear. You are neighbor Amber's daughter. And what he is about, to let you engage yourself to this strange young man, I cannot imagine."

Her severity relaxed into a small chuckle at the discomposure which she had again created. Upon which she said, very loftily, that she had understood that she was to be taken for a round in the chair. A wave of her walking-stick indicated that she had no use for any one not connected with the program.

Margaret's single desire, now, was to get John away. She felt that he had been horribly wounded. Far indeed was she from guessing the impulse which had moved him to thrust forward the identity he had up to this denied or from suspecting the experiment which he had made on his own sick brain, and what vital issue he had set upon the result! She only knew that he was suffering; she was torn, herself, in a helpless sympathy. She must get him away. He could endure no more, nor could she.

But, as she tried to draw him with her, the dowager paused on the step of her bath chair; the expression of satisfied spite had passed away from her fine old features, to be replaced by a strange, pale, unearthly look.

"I saw them all three last night; John and his brothers —my three dear grandsons! I saw John, with young Edward and Stephen. So, whoever you are, you cannot be my grandson John." She gave a laugh, uncannily triumphant, and hoisted her trembling limbs into the chair.

As she settled herself on the cushions and the nurse tucked the rug about her knees, she nodded her bonneted head portentously once again in the direction of John Tempest's motionless figure:

"My grandson John ran in to see me last night, after dinner," she repeated, "with young Edward and Stephen. I take it very kind of them, but I told him not to bring his dog again."

"His dog, granny!" cried Gabrielle with a little squeal.

"Yes, my dear, the dog. John's dog he's so fond of. The great clumsy retriever."

"But, but——" No one but Gabrielle had the courage to press the matter. She, with nervous eagerness, rolling bright eyes full of excitement from one to another, went on: "When? I mean—was last night the first time you

thought you saw Hod? If so, it is funny! I must say. I must say; it's awfully queer!"

"Thought? What do you mean by 'thought' I saw, Miss?"

"Oh, granny, never mind! Do answer."

"If you must know, since the day when the dreadful brute attacked my little pet, John has been thoughtful enough not to bring his dog in, till last night. And I don't think he'll do it again. Prince was so extremely annoyed! And so was I!"

"Prince!" The old cross "Pom" that had been buried under the oak tree behind the lodge these five years or more!

"Ugh!" shuddered Gabrielle. She turned to Margaret with a blanched face. "My dear, it's too uncanny! Poor old Hod is dead—dead, I say! Dead, my dear! Jenkins found him quite stiff last night, when he went in to bring him his supper. I didn't like to tell you. Afraid of upsetting John, you know. He'd forgotten Hod, hadn't he? Oh my, there's granny calling! Coming, granny!"

The girl sprang back to her post and seized the reins. Chucking, whistling, cracking her whip, she started the chair with energy.

Margaret and John watched the procession lurch away over the downs, the majestic bonnet bobbing and swinging. The house door was closed discreetly. They were alone. Margaret lifted her eyes to John's face and what she saw there made her heart rise. She caught both his hands in hers, filled with the single desire to comfort and strengthen. He clung to her with a desperate passion, and yet, with something of a child's terror. She could have cried over him like a sorrowing mother, but she had to be brave for two.

"Let us go home. Hush! No, I will hear nothing now. Later, later!"

He looked at her wildly, beseechingly, but the words died on his lips. In silence they slowly trod the downward path; she leading him by the hand, as if he had been blind.

CHAPTER XII

THE NEXT HEIR

HULLO!" said Gabrielle. She stood, a pretty, airy figure, at the top of the two steps that led down from the outer hall into the great living-room, stripping the garden gloves from her slender hands, a cool gay smile tilting the corners of her lips. "Hullo, cousin Teddy! I saw the big car, as I brought Toby in. Did Margaret tell you how awful granny was, mother? And how she made our blood run cold. But she got quite jolly afterwards. I say, I saw your grand car, Cousin Teddy, but I hadn't a notion."

"My dear little girl," said Lady Seneschal; she was flushed in the face and flustered in manner. "Your cousin's brought his wife. This is my daughter, Gabrielle, er, er——"

She paused. There is a little awkwardness in not remembering the Christian name of a close relative, intensified when that relative happens to have been picked out of a Revue chorus. The young person in question supplied the deficiency with a roll of handsome if rather prominent dark eyes.

"Burril!" she said.

"She means Beryl," said Mr. Edward Seneschal-Smith with a snigger.

He was standing with his back to the log fire; a burly youth, with a congested face. Everything about him seemed to protrude; his elbows, his knees, his ears, his eyes, his pockets.

Margaret, sitting unnoticed in the shadow of a tall Spanish leather screen, considered him with grave distaste. Here then stood the man who, failing John, was heir to Thornbarrow! She contrasted him with the picture, fresh in her mind, of John as, upon the threshold of his room, he had paused to look back at her. John, with his olive face, his thoughtful, luminous eyes from which so noble, though haunted, a soul looked forth! If he had struck out a line of his own in coloring he had certainly kept the distinction of the race, their spirit above all, spirit predominant, John, and this creature here was no Seneschal! He did not even look like a gentleman. He was all coarse flesh; the kind of man who would marry that kind of woman, and then speak of her, look at her as he was doing; take the world to witness what a confounded ass he had made of himself!

"Didn't I say *Burril*, you donkey?" protested Mrs. Seneschal-Smith in her turn inviting her relations to share her low opinion of Teddy's intellect, with a shrug and a roll of her eyes, and a contemptuous down-drawn smile.

But Lady Seneschal, a scarlet flame of excitement on either cheek and bright glances darting hither and thither with a sort of animal furtiveness, was too agitated to pay any heed to such connubial badinage. She seemed, indeed, scarcely to know what she was doing or saying; yet her next words showed Margaret that she had one very definite apprehension.

"Yes, this is Gabrielle—Gabrielle and you haven't met, have you? Of course, I mean to say, I know none of us have had the pleasure of meeting her, your wife, I mean, Teddy. Delightful surprise. You'll lunch, of course, take lucky pot, lucky pot, what? Gabie dear, run up and tell your brother he mustn't come down. I say John mustn't

come down. Quite too much for him! Invalid, you know. Doctor's orders. No risks taken, no harm done, what? No risks, that is what the doctor says. Oh dear, there's the gong. Run, Gabie, run!"

Teddy Seneschal-Smith's protuberant eyes were fixed and staring. He stood with his chin forward, inflating his nostrils, his mouth wide-open upon a meaningless smile. Margaret was quick to see that behind this mask of vacancy sharp wits were at work. He was sniffing the air, as if he could smell mystery in it.

She had a sudden intuition that he had heard rumors of John's strange condition, and that he had come to ascertain for himself how his own prospects stood. She thought to understand, too, that bereft of any ideals himself, the mind of the collateral heir to Thornbarrow would be ready to impute the lowest motives, the vilest machinations to others. In a flash, she realized Lady Seneschal's fears and shared them. What terrible consequences might not ensue if her poor boy were to bring out his delusions before such a witness! She sprang forward from her shadowed place.

"Let me go, Lady Seneschal. Gabie, come back; I'll go."

Both the visitors stared at her. Teddy Seneschal-Smith broke into protest:

"Oh, come, Cousin Amelia—you don't mean it? Oh, I say, and us coming all the way, to the 'whatchercallit,' congratulations—Oh, I say!"

Here his glance met Margaret's stern eyes, and he fell silent, abashed, he knew not why.

Gabrielle had halted on the top of the steps like a poised bird, her indifferent, laughing face over her shoulder. But before Margaret could reach her, there was a

slow, uncertain step in the hall; John's tall figure appeared.

"Too late!" cried Margaret in her soul. Whatever was to happen she must be beside him. She pushed Gabrielle on one side and took his arm.

"John," she said in a low urgent voice, "your cousin Teddy Seneschal-Smith is here!"

He looked at her, his brows drawn together. He was trying to understand the something of imminent importance she sought to convey. Her eyes hung on him, full of love and warning. As she pressed against him, he could feel her heart beat upon his arm in strong throbs. The whole of her virginal womanhood seemed to be casting itself upon him in an appeal of love. Quick apprehension was still impossible to his confusedly working mind. He could not yet connect signs and tokens and leap to a conclusion; but he was a man every moment more deeply enamored. Feeling the call of her love without knowing the meaning of it, his head swam, his senses were confounded. As she led him into the room he was conscious only of her.

"Ah!" cried Lady Seneschal, endeavoring with hysterical cheerfulness to carry off the situation, "this is naughty. Naughty! You know, John, you're not supposed to see visitors. Margaret, you ought to look after him better. But here you are. And here *you* are, Teddy. It can't be helped. Yes, Teddy, it's John; it's our dear boy, after all. You know he's engaged. An old story. Margaret, Miss Amber! John, John, John, don't you see your Cousin Teddy, and—and—his wife? Of course, she's your cousin, too. Barrel—I mean Borrel—really, my dear, I mean to say, such a funny name! I'll call you Mrs. Teddy."

Brought to a halt by the pressure of Margaret's fingers, John remained passive while an unknown, and to him instantly repulsive, individual grasped him by the hand and pumped it up and down.

"I say! Awfully jolly your turning up safe, after all! Congrats and all that, don't you know! Rum go, though, Turks nearly did for you, didn't they? Rum," repeated Mr. Seneschal-Smith, still shaking the unresponsive hand, his greenish, blood-shot eyes probing the other's face. "It would have made a jolly difference to me, if they had done you in. Ha-ha! But I'm the best-natured chap in the world; and 'pon honor, 'pon honor, I'm as pleased as Punch——"

He broke off with a final wrench of John's fingers; then suddenly the question flew, like a stone from a catapult:

"Remember me, old chap? Aha, don't say you have forgotten Cousin Teddy?"

Lady Seneschal gasped; but for the life of her could bring out nothing but an incoherent babble:

"What nonsense—what nonsense! I say what nonsense!"

It was a trap, an odious trap! The abominable Teddy was here with no other purpose than to spy out the nakedness of the land; and, Heaven knew, to make capital out of poor John's unhappy condition! All depended now upon what the wretched boy would answer. If he denied his identity to Teddy Seneschal-Smith it would be bad enough, they might be let in for a lawsuit; but if, on the other hand, he were to pretend to remember the man whom he had never seen, the fat would be in the fire indeed.

She cast a frenzied glance at Margaret. Why did not Margaret speak? Margaret, who knew as well as she did that John had never met his cousin before—that the

family reconciliation had only taken place after the death of Edward and Stephen! Margaret had a cool head. Margaret always knew what to say to John; why did not she intervene, put her word in now, show him, warn him, do something, prevent them from being all scored off by this scheming fellow

Margaret kept silence, but her eyes sought her lover's passionately and his answered back with a kindred flame.

The pause seemed monstrous; Teddy repeated the question with a taunting air which placed him, Margaret thought, beyond the pale of manhood. It roused even John's concentrated thought to anger. He surveyed the young man from head to foot and said then, very quietly:

"You have heard, I think, that my memory has been affected by this wound——" He lifted his hand to his scarred forehead and dropped it again. "So you must forgive me. If I ever saw you before, I have forgotten it."

Teddy slapped him on the shoulder and laughed uproariously.

"Never mind, old chap! Thought I'd catch you out. One on us, Beryl, what? We never did meet, that's the joke of it. Ha-ha! Look here, I'm not an out-and-outer, you know, whatever my poor old dad may have been! And whatever he did, it was not the fault of a little cuss like me, but all's well that ends well. Ain't there a play of that name, Beryl?—'pon honor, I'm glad you've turned up safe—if not sound. And I've come to say so."

"Well, I do think that's very kind indeed of Cousin Teddy," chirped Gabrielle as no one else responded. She was regarding him with a friendly glint in her eyes.

"And I'm sure we all feel it so," cried Lady Seneschal, relieved by the turn of the situation and regaining the power of language. She took the ex-chorus girl by her

fat bare elbow—Mrs. Teddy had shed her opulent furs and stood with massive proportions, clad according to the present preposterous fashion, in an exiguous black satin shift.

"Come, Margaret; come, Gabie."

Teddy's boisterous mirth rang out again. "Gaby—is that what you call her? Funny kind of patron saint, I don't think."

"Short for Gabrielle," explained the young lady amiably.

They were moving into the dining-room, in a desultory bunch. Gabrielle's eyes were fixed with an amazement, which did not exclude admiration, upon the well-developed limbs which, emerging from the black satin skirt in front of her, seemed almost naked in their flesh-colored stockings.

"Cousin Beryl is very smart, isn't she?" she whispered.

"Oh, very!" Teddy winked with the eye nearest to her. "Smart ain't the word. You should see her at a jazz! Practically all off, then."

Gabrielle might have been offended, had not her thistledown mind been caught by a word of interest. "Jazz—jazz? Does your wife jazz? Do you? I'd like to see it. I always wanted to see it. Mother says it's horrid. I say, how can she know it's horrid till she's seen it."

Teddy Seneschal-Smith's prawn-like gaze remained fixed upon his young cousin from the dining-room door to the table, as if she had been a natural curiosity. It was not until he sat down beside her that he again addressed her.

"You are a regular innocent, aren't you?"

There was some disgust in his tone. She was a pretty

thing, and all that; but as a latter-day youth, he had no use for innocence.

Mrs. Seneschal-Smith was a large young woman; she had an undeniable share of good looks, in a full-lipped, full-cheeked, ox-eyed way. Her naturally dark locks were dyed a mahogany red. Her naturally florid complexion was overlaid with the last thing in mauve "liquid-powder." A handsome row of teeth would have produced a better effect if the vermilion lacquer which she applied to her lips had not made them seem discolored by contrast, and if her smile had not been of the kind which draws the mouth down at the corners. She spoke but little, and that in a low unctuous voice, with an accent more Manchester than Cockney. But she made good use of her eyes in the direction of John Seneschal, whose austere good looks and air of suffering gravity, taken in conjunction with his apparent unconsciousness of her presence, struck her facile fancy.

The meal at which so extraordinarily incongruous a company were gathered was scarcely likely to be a pleasant one; though Gabrielle's unconscious chatter covered many an awkward pause. The hostess was glad when she could give the signal to rise from table.

When they returned to the hall Teddy, with an insufferably knowing look, resisted Lady Seneschal's too obvious effort to retain him by her side, and drew a chair close to John with the obvious intention of engaging him in conservation. Margaret, with a flushing cheek, ignored her hostess's nods and winks urging her to mount guard. Although her heart beat in her throat and her ear was strained to catch what was passing between the two men, she would not play the keeper over John. She

was too intelligent to make such a blunder; too proud for him and herself publicly to insult his infirmity.

She need have had no apprehension. John held himself from first to last as would have become a son of the house; and all the Teddy's astute efforts to find confirmation of the rumors which had reached him, failed. When first that gentleman had heard of his cousin's condition—and such things inevitably get known, the more rapidly because of attempts at secrecy—he had been ready with the theory that here was a new Tichborne case. He had sworn across sundry bars, and in many a green room and supper club, that he would jolly well see no such game played upon him. The Seneschals hated him—a stick-in-the-mud, deadly lot they were! That dismal bloke, Sir Edward, had looked at him, well he wasn't an imaginative chap, don't you know! but there had been a regular hymn of hate kind of business in his eyes that day when he had gone down to see him. "Fact! you'd have said it was I who had done the killing of those pore chaps, the way he looked at me out of his bath chair! Asked me down, mind you—asked me down and as good as insulted me. That was before this fellow turned up, the fellow they call John. He says he isn't John. Doesn't know his own name. What do you think of that? Now what do you think of that?"

Mr. Seneschal-Smith's friends, however, if they happened to be his own social status were scarcely as encouraging to his hopes as he would have wished.

"I wouldn't build on it, if I were you," they would say. "Lots of chaps who have got bowled over by shell-shock have gone dotty, one way or another; but if their own relatives know them, it knocks your theory into a cocked hat—see?"

To which Teddy, scowling, had always the same response:

"Well, I'm next heir, anyhow, and if he's as dotty as they say, it's a dead cert for me, and my children."

But, in his own mind, he had continued to the first conviction; and this was why he had taken his relatives unawares. Now, he could not but feel that Cousin Amelia's manner had been uncommonly "rum." It wasn't for nothing, he was sure, that she tried to keep the young man upstairs. As for the chap himself, there was something devilish wild about his eyes. It was a monstrous shame to allow that handsome girl to marry a fellow who was either a madman or a fraud. Margaret Amber. "Gad!" Such had been Teddy's reflections at the latter end of lunch. "Amber! Why, she must be the millionaire's daughter! Pots and pots of money! They couldn't be in their senses to let her marry a fellow like that."

Mr. Seneschal-Smith, watching the erect grace of her figure swing out of the room before him, told himself that she would be the very girl for him when those loose marriage bonds which united him to Beryl would have been dissolved, as they must be before long one way or another. Divorce?—quite the tip now-a-days. "Gad! if it's Thornbarrow they're after; I might do as well as another—better than a chap with a head knocked silly, any day."

With these agreeable schemes floating in his mind, he sat himself down before John, drawing his chair so as to practically cut him off from the rest of the group, and began his investigations with the elegance of thought and diction which characterized him.

"Nasty kind of a bash you've got across your forehead! Bullet went right through, didn't it? My word, it's no wonder—er—brain's a bit topsy-turvy."

John paused in the act of lighting a cigarette to stare at his interlocutor; then he shot a look at Margaret, met her glance—when had that instant response ever failed him?—and smiled. He was still smiling slightly when he looked back at "the Rotter"; but his gaze had hardened. He did not answer, and the other pursued, growing a shade more purple than usual.

"Hard lines, rather, to have that on top of Kut, too—eh? Perhaps you've forgotten about Kut, though?"

John started, lifted his head with a jerk, dropped the flaming match and let it lie unheeded.

"Kut!"—A livid pallor spread over his face as if some blast of death had blown upon it. From the blank of the past rose a vision of horror; a jostling throng of anguish; sights, sounds, smells, miseries of mind and body. He closed his eyes for one moment, as if to shut it all out; he came back to himself on a wave of anger, as Teddy's snigger struck his ear. The match was still flaming on the floor. He put out his foot and crushed it. Then he turned and gave his companion a look in which antagonism had deepened into wrath. What kind of a little beast was this? And what was he driving at?

Almost before the questions could be formed in words, they answered themselves:

The next heir to Thornbarrow!

A dark flush succeeded the pallor on John's face. Once more he looked at Margaret, and once more drew the dear return gaze, tender and strong.

"We don't talk about Kut," he said then, slowly and disdainfully. It had been—he remembered in a capricious flash—the rule of the prison camp. The words fell contemptuously; and Teddy covered his discomfiture with one of his meaningless laughs.

"Wouldn't be much loss if you'd forgotten that part, eh? But must be a bit awkward to forget your own name. Might have got mixed up with some other fellow, what? Jolly awkward if you are!"

John's lips parted in a faint smile. He felt himself ten times more a Seneschal than the vulgarian before him. In spite of the failure of the day's test and the dowager's denial of him, he asked himself suddenly was it not more probable that he should be what they all thought him than that the ancient race, Thornbarrow, and all its traditions should end in such a representative as this?

"I've been very lucky," said John Tempest coldly. He lit his cigarette at last, and his hand did not shake.

"Lucky! Rather!"

The other spoke mechanically; his congested face became set into heavy lines of sullenness. Throwing his half smoked cigarette away, he pushed John's case roughly aside, and produced a large Corona of his own, which he proceeded to light while angry cogitation wrote itself on his twitching forehead.

"I have not done with you yet, my buck," he was thinking. "And who are you after all to speak to me in this guardee fashion, you out of a nigger regiment!"

As he let fly the first puff of his cigar, he fixed John with all the insolence of his prominent eyes. John looked steadily back; and for the space of nearly a minute, the two exchanged unspoken defiance which grew till it approached fierceness. Teddy's gaze was the first to waver and drop away. He tried to cover the weakness with something between a laugh and a snort; and, removing his cigar, was about to deliver himself of further speech when more unexpected visitors entered upon the scene.

CHAPTER XIII

LORD AMBER IS WARNED

"OH, my!" said Mrs. Teddy Seneschal-Smith under her breath.

The exclamation was wrung from her by the appearance of Lady Amber who rolled in, wrapped in sables, followed by her gray, compact husband. It did not take the ex-chorus girl long to appraise the value of the furs. "Oh, my," she thought again, "nearly black!"

She had never seen such furs except once, at Monte Carlo, on a Polish siren who was the queen of the hour. Nor had she ever beheld such *cabochon* rubies as adorned Lady Amber's fat ears; nor such pearls as peeped between the creases of the fat neck where the sables parted; nor such an ospreyed toque as that which surmounted the fat face, painted like an image, with its loops of mahogany-red curls on either side.

"Oh, my!" thought Mrs. Teddy. She was kept on an uncommonly short allowance by a husband who could be as mean as most married *viveurs* and to whom she was no longer anything but a drag,—"all wasted on a face and figure like that!"

For a second time that day, Lady Seneschal was taken by surprise; and most disagreeably.

There were perhaps no two people whom she would less have liked to see brought into conjunction with the suspicious and inquisitive next in succession, than Lord Amber (that shrewd man of business) and Lady Amber,

whose objection to the marriage was no secret. Heaven knew what that "horrid little wretch" had been saying to John, and in what state the poor unhappy boy would be for the important first meeting (since his return) with the future parents-in-law. She had put off the event as long as possible with Margaret's full concurrence.

Now if John were to begin his twaddle about being dead and buried, the results might be—well, Lady Seneschal's gyrating mind could scarcely contemplate the extent of the possible catastrophe. She was in the habit of talking what sounded nonsense to other people, keeping a very strong hold on her own meaning the while; irrational as she seemed, she generally enforced her way through most obstacles. But the moment was too much for her. And she herself did not know what she was saying.

"It never pours but it rains, never pours but it rains! Fancy you, Lady Amber!—so unexpected! Delightful! How do you do, Lord Amber? It never pours but it rains! We were all going in to lunch—weren't we, Gabie?—when our cousin, our cousin, Mr. Seneschal-Smith and his wife —Mr. Seneschal-Smith, Mrs. Seneschal-Smith—Lord and Lady Amber. Cousins, you know. Cousins, cousins—kin and kith, as the saying goes. And very kind it was of them to pop in, and take lucky-pot all the way from Torquay. They spent Easter at Torquay, motoring up to London, took us on their way. So convenient. Motors, motors, annihilate space, what? One's never safe, I say —*on n'est jamais sauf*."—Lady Seneschal plunged into her peculiar French for the benefit of Lady Amber, as a foreigner, but finding this personage engaged in embracing Margaret with swimming eyes and a general air of reproachful tenderness, she wheeled back upon Lord Amber and went on, with a volubility the more feverish that

she saw his eyes fixed upon John, who was standing silent and apart. "I say, Lord Amber, nobody can call their homes their own, now-a-days. You never know who will not spring upon you with a motor. An Englishman's house no longer his castle, what?"

The millionaire stood with his hands behind his back, his head bent, in an attitude of courteous attention. Nevertheless, his gaze never shifted from the pale scarred countenance of the young soldier. Suddenly John looked up, their eyes met, then Margaret's father smiled.

Margaret freed herself from the octopus-like tentacles of the maternal clasp, took her lover by the hand and led him forward:

"Father, here's John,—John, did you understand? This is father."

Her simplicity, her quick forestalling of any possible confusion of mind on the part of the wounded man, cleared the situation as a fresh wind drives vapors apart. Lady Seneschal stopped babbling. Lady Amber swallowed down her sighs. Teddy Seneschal-Smith dropped his stare of avid expectation to resume his cigar with a show of indifference. As for Lord Amber and John Tempest, sudden sympathy had already flashed between them; as they grasped hands, it became intensified.

"I am glad to see you looking fine, John," said Lord Amber, who had picked up a certain American turn of speech, in early days of travel. He was a man of few words; but the grip of his square, strong, tenacious hand said the rest.

Margaret gave her father's arm a little pinch of gratitude; she knew her engagement had received the paternal ratification. The financier now led John up to Lady Amber, who had sunk into an armchair beside the restored

Lady Seneschal. Gabrielle had removed the priceless sable wraps, and the obese Spaniard, with many sighs and gasps, many rolls of the eyes and flutters of her pocket handkerchief, was going through the pantomime of feeling incumbent upon a mother of her race in circumstances of affliction:

"No tea, thanks, Lady Seneschal! Very kind. But tea, my medical man say, is poison to my 'eart. Ah, my poor 'eart! Ah, what emotions! Ah, my Margaret—she look so blooming, so rosy!"

A sob stuck in her throat, it being, apparently the unbearable of pathos that Margaret, the self-immolated victim, should look healthy on the very steps, as it were, of the altar of sacrifice.

As John towered before her, Lord Amber spoke, in a voice which thirty years' experience had taught his wife held a command:

"Carmela, you, too, will wish John welcome home."

Lady Amber drew herself up with an air of tremendous dignity:

"Ah, *Dios*, Amber," she began, "it goes without saying! One felicitates one's friends——"

Then she stopped, burst disconcertingly into tears, and, still more disconcertingly, springing from her seat with an alacrity amazing in one of her size, caught the young man to her capacious bosom.

"Ah, the poor boy! Is he not touching? So pale and gallant. And this hero is to be my son?—Ah, little Margaret, I come here to protest—and, behold, I bless! And there is Amber, who laughs!—Amber, you know what a 'eart I have. It is always so with me; take me by my 'eart, and you have got me altogether. Ah, to see them stand together, like that, the faithful ones, and both so

beautiful! I will have them both in my arms. Both, both!—Come, Margaret, there is room for you. The love of a mother must embrace both her children!"

Margaret gave the imprisoned John a quick look; but, while her lips laughed and her eyes mocked, her cheeks burned. She stepped within the maternal arm curved to grasp, and found herself crushed, with a soft violence, against her lover. And—while Lady Amber kissed and blessed, and showered facile tears upon them—for the first time, since his return, John's arm, too, was about her.

It was perhaps fortunate that, tottering back into her armchair, Lady Amber should have immediately claimed general attention. In the agitation caused by the mild attack of hysteria to which she treated the company, no one noticed how Margaret's face flamed, nor how deathly white John's had become.

"*Dios, ah Dios!* What emotions! And I with a 'eart so weak! Who would be a mother? Such emotions assassinate me. My smelling salts. Amber, if you are a man, my fan!—Brandy? Heavens, no! The very word turn the stomach.—Ah, Lady Seneschal, you are too kind! *Sal volatile?*—No, it is too exciting. But the least little drop of Benedictine. Yes, a little glass of Benedictine, that would set up the 'eart. And to restore the stomach . . . hold, my child, my Margaret, do I not see chocolate *éclairs* over there?—Pass me the plate, my angel."

Mrs. Teddy upon whom, however she might think them wasted, the furs and jewels of Lady Amber had made an ever-deepening impression, forestalled Margaret and proffered the dish of cakes, with an ingratiating smile. Her husband, who had his own reasons for desiring to be amiable to the Ambers, followed suit with a plate of bread and butter. The Spaniard dropped her mood of pathos

to stare from one to the other. Child of nature as she had shown herself, she had not been the wife of a millionaire for all these years without having developed some social acumen.

"Who is this person—this impossible person?" she was obviously asking herself. "From where does it come out? How does it find itself here?" She took an *éclair*, with slow, disdainful movement of wax-white, dimpled hands, blazing with rings. Then she turned her glance on Teddy: "Heavens, what a red face! What manners! What a lack of distinction! Ah, one sees what it is; a good-for-nothing who has declassed himself."

"No bread and butter, thank you," she said aloud. "Bread and butter on the head of such emotions! One must have the English brutality to imagine such a thing!"

Her eyes sought John. What a difference! How handsome, how well-bred! How interesting with his pallor and that great scar! Ah, she had always admired a dark man! "Why, he has almost something of a Spanish look. And what an air of race!" said Lady Amber to herself complacently.

She saw herself in imagination on his arm, in a London drawing-room; she could be proud of such a one. "My son-in-law!" "The master of Thornbarrow"—"Sir John Seneschal of Thornbarrow!"

Margaret caught her mother's glance and rejoiced. Lady Amber sipped the Benedictine which Gabrielle had brought her; coughed conventionally, languidly lifted the *éclair* and drove her small white teeth into its lusciousness. Munching, she kissed her finger tips at her daughter and turned meltingly to Lady Seneschal:

"Ah, dear friend, you and I! Joy and sorrow! What

it is to be a mother! Sorrow and joy! The mother's 'eart always in pain! We understand each other."

Lord Amber, with a faint subterranean laugh, half satire, half satisfaction, gave his daughter a little nod. Carmela would be now only too effusively approving, too overwhelmingly maternal, too embarrassingly blessing. John would have to be rescued from demonstrations of affection instead of scenes of hostile protest.

"Oh, look here," said Beryl gustily into her husband's ear, as he and she collided each with a dish, by the tea-table, "let's get out of this frost. I am about fed up!"

"Don't be more of a fool than you can help," said Mr. Seneschal-Smith with marital politeness. "Sit down and behave yourself, if you can. I've got a chance here which wouldn't come my way again in a hundred years."

"And don't old Mother Seneschal know it, too?" he added to himself, feeling the constant pursuit of Lady Seneschal's harassed gaze.

He chose his moment to place himself beside Lord Amber, and addressed him under his breath.

"I say, I don't want to make a fuss, you know, but—well—I'd like most awfully to have a word with you in private. It concerns you as well as myself. 'Pon honor, it does. Look here, Cousin Amelia's watching me like mad. She doesn't want you and me to talk together, you bet! But it's most awfully important, really. Couldn't I be showing you the view or something?"

Here Lady Seneschal did indeed dive down upon the two.

"Lord Amber, I think we ought to have a little talk, a little talk about our dear young people. At least we ought to fix a day for a little talk. I'd like to bring you up to Sir Edward, but he has one of his dreadful head-

aches. He's not well. Oh, no, he's not well! He'll never be well again. I say it's no use pretending. It's all downhill now. Only some days are better than others. This is a bad day. I told Teddy—didn't I, Teddy?—he couldn't see any one."

"Yes," responded the young man insolently. "And you wouldn't have let me see John, either, if you could have helped it."

He swung a look full of meaning on Lord Amber. The latter's gray eyes were expressionless. He surveyed each in turn; then he spoke to Lady Seneschal with marked courtesy.

"I will," he said, "give myself the pleasure of motoring over to you some morning, very soon. I hope I may find Sir Edward better and able to see me. Anyhow, I should much like to have, as you suggest, a quiet talk with you." He paused. "This young gentleman," he said, "your cousin, I understand, has just told me that he has something to say to me in private. We will stroll out on the terrace, with your permission. I don't think," he added, and there was a light flick of contempt in his tone, "that it need take long."

Under all her excitability and her apparent inconsequence there was a hardness as of steel in Lady Seneschal which it would have taken far better-tempered weapons than those of her young cousin to penetrate. If he had expected her to betray herself he was destined to disappointment.

"Oh, my dear Teddy!" cried she, and though her eyes shot fury and her cheek burned with a fiercer scarlet, she spoke with perfect composure, "what on earth can you have to say to Lord Amber that you cannot mention before us? Unless indeed," she gave a malicious simper,

"oh, well, there, it's the penalty of wealth, I suppose! All the impecunious young men who have outrun the constable, think you can make another millionaire of them by the flap of the hand. What, what? Lord Amber, you know the house, and Mr. Seneschal-Smith does not. It's only the second time he's been here—please take him to the terrace."

She walked away from them with the light grace peculiar to her. Lord Amber looked after her, with a certain admiration. He saw that she was, for some reason not yet quite clear to him, desperately uneasy at the thought of this private conversation; that, somehow, the unprepossessing youth, incongruously kin to Seneschal, had obtained some secret hold upon her, which she dreaded his using. Nevertheless, how well she held herself!

As they emerged out upon the terrace he wheeled upon his companion with so sharp a movement that the young man started.

"Now, what is it?"

The voice, too, was sharp. Here was a very different being from the urbane, even-toned, quiet-mannered man of a little while ago. Teddy hesitated, but it was only for a moment. He was not easily abashed, and he was, moreover, sure of his ground.

"I say, you know," he began, wagging his head and speaking in highly virtuous tones. "Do vou know what that fellow says of himself?"

"Of whom are you speaking?"

Teddy stared. His color grew mottled.

"Of whom? Of John, of course."

Lord Amber stood, his chin on his chest, his profound gaze unencouragingly fixed, waiting for further enlightenment. The other proceeded:

"You know, he says he ain't John Seneschal at all."

The horrified amazement he expected to evoke was conspicuously absent; and it was upon a lower note, though with a movement of the elbow that was intended to express all that the most knowing nudge ever conveyed to apprehending ribs, that he added:

"Well—and if he ain't?"

Lord Amber had not expected this *sequitur*, Teddy was quick to see. He went on in louder, more certain accents.

"What if the fellow is right? Oh, he doesn't say it now, I daresay! But he has said it. I happen to know for a fact that he would have it they were all making some sort of a bally mistake, and that John Seneschal, the real John Seneschal, is dead and buried. It suits my Thornbarrow cousins' game very well to talk of illusions —what? And the old man——"

He broke off. In spite of his pachydermatous self-conceit, he began to apprehend that he was not carrying conviction.

"I know everything that you can possibly tell me about John Seneschal," said Lord Amber after a long pause. "And, as for your preposterous suggestion, you forget, I think, that I have known him from boyhood. If his friends have recognized him, as well as his family——"

Teddy interrupted with a snorting laugh:

"Recognized him, have you? Oh, of course, if you recognized him, that's all right! But one thin, dark chap is uncommonly like another thin, dark chap. After eight years—what? Thought it my duty, you know. The story was so uncommon queer. Cousin Amelia is so uncommon queer—your daughter is such an uncommon nice girl—'pon my word, as one of the family—hang it all,

you know, I'm the heir after him—and it's my business, my business—what?"

Lord Amber was slowly and most disagreeably smiling.

"I don't think you would get any lawyer to espouse your case, Mr. Seneschal-Smith. If you'll take my advice you will drop it. Drop it," he repeated more loudly; he might have been speaking to a dog. Then, with a change of tone: "There is no advantage in our prolonging this conversation," he concluded.

Slowly stepping, they had reached the end of the terrace. The millionaire turned and began to walk briskly towards the house.

"But, hang it all," cried Teddy, clumping after him, furiously determined not to rest upon this rebuff. "Hang it all, if he *is* John Seneschal, he's as mad as a hatter. Is not that just as bad? Hadn't you better hold on a bit, and not let that fine girl of yours—your only child, ain't she—throw herself away on him? Look here, Lord Amber, I know what I am talking about. You take it from me, they daren't trust that fellow to say a word. There's Cousin Amelia could hardly breathe, not knowing what he'd be up to. Oh, I saw her! Didn't she try to prevent his coming down at all? Would have given anything to keep him away from me! Fact—Lord Amber, I say, won't you listen to a word?"

Lord Amber, who had been walking on as if the other did not exist, cast a single rejecting glance backwards at this appeal.

"This is certainly not your business, young man," he said cuttingly, and entered the house.

On the way home Lady Amber was exceedingly loquacious; by turns eagerly making wedding plans and ex-

patiating on her maternal feelings; but Lord Amber was strangely silent, even for him.

That night, while his wife's soft snores filtered through the door of her opulent mother-of-pearl-hued bedchamber, he lay on the hard camp bed in the curtainless Spartan room (which was, Lady Amber vowed, his morbid taste) and heard the distant chimes of the village church strike every hour. Two phrases kept repeating themselves in his mind in the hoarse insolent voice of the boor who was next of kin after John Seneschal: "*What if he ain't?*" and "*One dark chap is uncommon like another dark chap, after eight years!*"

Lord Amber, the man of action, when he rose from his unrestful pillow at the breaking of the lovely May morning, had come to a resolution very alien to his nature. There was nothing for him, he decided, but silence, quiescence and watchfulness.

The indomitable Teddy made a last effort to pursue his investigations at Thornbarrow. He suggested that it was growing uncommon late, and he didn't know what kind of a hole they might land in unless Cousin Amelia retained them for the night.

But Cousin Amelia had seen, from the first glance at Lord Amber's face after the colloquy, that, whatever mischief Teddy had tried to make—and there was no doubt the horrid youth was intent on mischief—he had failed. The farewell pressure of Lord Amber's hand had been quite especially warm; and his low, measured voice had had an unusual kindness in it when he appointed the following Tuesday for the coming interview. He had looked at John, as he shook him by the hand, with unmistakable liking; and he had looked at Teddy, nodding

to him and not shaking hands at all, with dislike, also unmistakable.

So Lady Seneschal, still scarlet-cheeked, but this time with triumph, felt her position strong enough to decline to entertain her young relatives a moment longer.

"Oh, my dear Teddy, two invalids! Think! Two invalids in the house! And the butler run off his legs; and no servants to be had, no servants! It's quite impossible. And you can put up at Blandford, or at Salisbury, and even at Winchester, if you start at once. Charming hotels, charming hotels. Gabie, ring the bell; Cousin Barrel wants her car. And I must say good-by now. Sir Edward, sick man's claim, catamount! I always say, sick man catamount! Good-by, my dear Barrel. Delighted, I'm sure, to have made your acquaintance. Gabie, dear little girl, help Cousin Barrel into her coat. Such a quaint name, Barrel! Where's—oh, Margaret and John are gone. What my poor boys used to call obsquastulated. Lovers, lovers!" said Lady Seneschal, "lovers!"

She moved away, repeating the word to herself, her eyes half closed, a satisfied smile on her lips.

Mr. Seneschal-Smith gazed after her with venom.

" 'Pon my word, that's what you may call being kicked out! Come along, will you?" He turned roughly upon Beryl, who was rolling frightened eyes from him to the cheerfully imperturbable Gabrielle. "Come, you can jolly well cut the kissing business, I should think."

"Good-by, then," chirped Gabrielle, perfunctorily.

"Good-by!" drawled Beryl.

Teddy Seneschal-Smith, with his wife, drove down the long Thornbarrow approach at a speed which considerably endangered both their existences. And as he pelted on, he peppered the ambient air with "Damns."

CHAPTER XIV

SUNSET GLORY AND LIGHTNING FLASH

JOHN had drawn Margaret out with him, laying his hand upon her arm with a compelling urgency. It was the first time that he had ever imposed his will upon her. Hitherto it had been she who, even to the minor details of life, had given him the lead in everything; he had been content to follow her with a complete dependence which had reminded her poignantly of that of a blind man. And, indeed, she had often told herself his was a blindness worse than physical, since it was of the mind. But now, as he hurried her out on the terrace, she, looking up into his face, saw that a new light had come into it. He returned her glance with one of unveiled ardor.

"Come to the King's Barrow," he said, under his breath.

Her heart beat quickly; her lover was no longer blind.

The May afternoon had sunk to the mellow hour; the shadows were long across the downs, the sunshine was already rosy. It was the hour when wild things began to venture out; and there was a scurry of rabbits, white tails darting, before their steps. The birds were flying low as if racing with their own shadows. A company of deer skimmed across the sky line and vanished, light as thought, delicately fantastic as dreams.

The lovers went with quick strides up the long sweep of down that led to the King's Barrow. They spoke no word; but Margaret's ears seemed already full of the clamor of the love which was about to find voice at last.

Constantly she cast glances at him. How swiftly he went, and with what strength! His manhood had come back to him at a leap. When they got to the strange grassy tumulus where the ages-dead chieftains lay, John paused and drew a deep breath; then, still without a word, he opened his arms. Margaret cast herself upon his breast.

"John! My own John, at last——!"

His lips were pressed against hers, her heart sang for joy and tenderness, and ruth, and overwhelming love. She could pour it all out now, all that had so long overbrimmed.

"If this is wrong, it is damnably wrong!" he cried passionately. "But, all the same, it is heaven!"

As if it had been taken from their love the whole sky was suddenly incandescent, apocalyptic with color and wild shifting, cloud shapes, monstrous plumy angels' wings, hued like the rainbow. It is a vision not uncommon over the great Downs. The lovers' faces glowed upon each other in this unearthly radiance; yet so absorbed were they in their own Paradise hour they never noticed it. It seemed all natural that they should be thus transfigured.

They sat, side by side, on the slope of the Barrow; his arm was about her. In the strength of that embrace, Margaret felt strong enough herself to defy fate. There was no hesitation in her heart as she answered him:

"Don't go back, John! Don't look back, even for a second! Go on, go forward! You and I have known each other from the first; now we hold each other. What else matters?"

"Nothing!"

It was true, he had known her, even in delirium. Here, on this spot, which he had known, too, from the first, why should he not feel sure at last? Why could he not stifle

doubt and be happy? Miracle for miracle, would it not be more incredible that he, recognized of all and himself recognizing so much, should be stranger and impostor, than that he should be just John Seneschal, suffering like many another poor fellow, from the effect of a head wound?

The belief in this happy miracle had been growing insensibly stronger with returning health. The desire to believe pressed him ever more urgently. Now he let himself go. It was inevitable. From the moment when Lady Amber had drawn them both into her soft-scented embrace and he had flung his arm about Margaret, the die had been cast. Wrong or not, insane or not, he could not pause or hesitate any more. Passion had caught him in an irresistible tide, and was rushing away with him. He was only a straw on the current.

"Margaret, Margaret!" he repeated in an ecstasy, and kissed her passionately, like the lover of the Canticle, "with the kisses of his mouth."

The hush of the twilight was upon them before they realized that the fires had died from the skies. Angels' wings had turned to mere gray wisps, golden and carmine rays that had set the earth in a flame had fled. The giant twisted shadows cast by the dwarfed thorn-trees, the freakish patches that had lain like black cowering things under every furze bush, had all merged into universal dimness.

John and Margaret woke to a ghost world from their radiant dream. Both were silent as they went slowly back towards the house. Only once did Margaret speak:

"There are spirits about to-night," she said with a half laugh that covered some earnestness. "Don't you feel them?"

He turned a questioning look upon her, but did not answer.

"It is a haunted place," she went on. And then, taking his arm: "You yourself—yes, you, John darling, came to me here, on this very spot once in the spirit. It was the day you were coming home. And I felt you—oh, as certainly as I do now! You came to me somehow, out of your love——"

She stopped; she had felt him shudder as she leaned against him.

"John?—surely, John, you are not nervous?" She tried to laugh, though somehow, after its great hour of joy, her heart felt heavy. "You're not nervous. You never could be afraid of a Thornbarrow ghost?"

"Ah, my God, am I not?"

"John——!" Her voice rang out sharply. Was it all to be fought out again?

He answered as if she had spoken the thought. "Oh, no, no—I defy them all!" and he caught her to him again.

The next day there was a great air of relief, of chastened happiness, over Thornbarrow. The news spread, like some perfume on the atmosphere, that John had come to himself again. The cloud that had brooded over the house seemed to have rolled away.

The rout of the Seneschal-Smiths and the ratification of the engagement by the Amber parents contributed not a little to the clearing of the dark sky. Even Margaret, so steadfast of temper and unshaken of purpose, had dreaded having to wage a conflict with her father over the beloved. Joy radiated like sunshine from her white forehead the morning after the dear coming-together on the moor. Sir Edward himself, carefully guarded as he

had been from the doubts and miseries gathering under his roof, felt the blessed change.

Lady Seneschal, all smiles, her mind darting with the apparent aimlessness of a midge over a pool, after a thousand disconnected trifles, was, in reality, weaving the web of her schemes. In the space of one morning the date of the wedding had been approximately fixed; Gabrielle and she had received *carte blanche* to pick out the child-bridesmaids; Sir Edward had been made to write to his solicitors; and the hour of Lord Amber's visit to discuss business had been settled by a breathless Gabrielle on the village telephone.

Even the fact that during the following days Margaret was frequently called to London on her mother's peremptory summons and, much against her will, was obliged by the exigencies of the trousseau hunt, to spend an occasional night away from Thornbarrow, did not, as the girl had feared, upset John's hardly won balance. On the contrary, each return, after the short separation, was a fresh renewal of that joy of recovery which had been theirs on the King's Barrow.

As for Lady Seneschal, she could scarcely conceal her exultation at the conclusion of the business discussion with Lord Amber. Gabrielle was forthwith enjoined to write to every connection of the family and all and sundry who could be called a friend, and spread the splendid news of John's engagement to Lord Amber's only child. The wedding would be an event in the county, since Lady Amber was to be indulged in her wish to have things done on a large and magnificent scale. Lady Seneschal's soul swelled with pride when she reflected on the inexhaustible riches which would henceforth accrue to the honor and glory of Thornbarrow.

About this time, too, John took to riding. Sir Edward made him a present of a fine horse, and it would be difficult to say which of the two invalids benefited most by the transaction. The elder man seemed to take a fresh grasp on his failing life every time he saw "his boy" gallop across the Downs, riding, the father thought proudly, as only a Seneschal could. Daily the young man would come straight from the saddle to the sick-room, his face more healthily bronzed with sun and wind and exercise.

Margaret, returning from each short absence, could mark fresh improvement in her lover. One evening—she had come driving her own little knockabout car from Vale Royal—she told herself that complete restoration could not now be long delayed.

"He's so nearly all right," she thought, "that his memory must return soon. It will all be just as simple as opening the shutters and letting in the sunlight to a room that has been lit with candles."

He who was to fling open the shutters upon John Tempest's dark room was destined to appear next day.

Margaret was far from guessing what a superlative part the Reverend James Dominick was about to play in her life when, coming into the hall at the luncheon hour, she beheld him in the company of Gabrielle.

"I've brought Mr. Dominick," cried this young person, returning flushed and pleasurably excited from her walk villagewards. "We haven't so very much time before the wedding, have we, mother? Have we, John? I thought you'd like to talk over matters with Mr. Dominick, the village festivities for the wedding and all that. I thought mother would like me to ask him to lunch. Mr. Dominick said he would have come this afternoon, anyhow. You

know he's come back quite well from Brighton, after his horrid 'flu.' Mr. Dominick says he felt dreadfully, being away from his flock at Easter. And he says, too—Mr. Dominick is so kind!—that he felt almost as much not being able to help us when dear John came home, so ill and everything. But, as Mr. Dominick says—" here Gabrielle laughed—"it would have been doubtful service to inflict his germ upon us—and John so ill and everything."

From sheer want of breath, Gabrielle stopped and fell, still laughing prettily, into an armchair, gazing up with an unusual warmth in her shallow eyes at the vicar's long, narrow face, the solemn cast of which was scarcely modified by the prim smile that pursed his lips.

He was a youngish man, had the Oxford intonation, hollow eyes and rather long teeth, withal a kind of ecclesiastical good looks; if you had seen him, no matter in what attire, if you had heard a single phrase from his lips, you would have known him Church of England on the spot. He was so marked with the stamp of office that he seemed to have been born clergyman as some are born sailors or musicians. He now unlocked his compressed lips to let fall a Mothers'-Meeting joke:

"It is, I trust, not 'love me, love microbe,' with me." He himself led the laughter with sonorous yet clerical propriety.

Lady Seneschal thought it very good; and she and Gabrielle, feeling that there was some lack of appreciation on Margaret's part, began to expound it to her, one across the other:

"Love microbe—'love me, love my dog!' You know the proverb?"

"Some people are rather offended if you don't want to

kiss them when they have influenza," Gabrielle explained more elaborately.

"My dear little girl!" cried Lady Seneschal, amused.

Gabrielle became scarlet:

"Well, mother—well, mother—you know what I mean——"

Here Mr. Dominick showed his perfect clerical tact: "I will run up and see Sir Edward before lunch. There will be just time, I think."

He paused before Margaret and held out his hand, into which, rather wonderingly, for they had already greeted each other, she placed hers.

Lingeringly, but very clerically, he pressed her fingers:

"I am so rejoiced, dear Miss Amber, I wish you, so earnestly, every rich and perfect blessing—John is a dear lad, a dear lad! Restored to you, to his parents, to us all, as by a miracle. You have not forgotten where thanks are due?"

His voice sank to an even more confidential undertone as he bent close to her. Margaret, stepping back and releasing herself, remembered, half humorously, half irritably, that she had heard how some of the parishioners called their vicar "Father," and declared he was "perfect in the confessional."

"I suppose that's the way he speaks to them," she thought. And indeed "Father Dominick," as he glided out of the room and upstairs, had a consciousness which agreeably warmed the region under his silk waistcoat, that even a prelate of the dear, erring, old Mother Church could not have acquitted himself with more unction.

Margaret wondered, as she looked at Gabrielle's transfigured face. The child was pious and the Reverend James Dominick represented to her the Christian Revela-

tion, the Apostolic Succession, with a dash of Archangel thrown in. To Margaret herself, that countenance so conventionally composed, that voice so deliberately urbane and self-consciously mellow, that air at once of being all things to all men yet watchfully withdrawn from human temptation, had the effect of utmost exasperation.

She had liked the good old hunting parson whom she had known in her childhood; and she had admired and trusted two or three R. C. chaplains whom she had seen at work in Flanders, facing every horror for the sake of their men. But this oleaginous Ritualist seemed to her to be neither fish nor fowl, nor even—she thought with a half laugh of a certain zealous Irish firebrand who might have passed as good red herring!

"Sir Edward is very bright—very bright, indeed," said the anomalous divine, noiselessly reëntering. He rubbed his palms with a modest air of deprecating the credit due to him for so comforting a statement.

The gong boomed. Mr. Dominick rubbed his hands again, in pleasant anticipation, and observed *sotto voce* to Gabrielle, with his pursed smile, that he was greedy enough to be glad that it was neither Friday nor fast-day. The air, he admitted, had made him "peckish"!

Gabrielle was delighted:

"Mother, Mr. Dominick admits he is peckish!"

Peckish seemed to Lady Seneschal, too, a droll word for their ascetic vicar to apply to himself.

"You don't mean to say—you don't mean to say, Mr. Dominick, that you've passions and appetites like ordinary humanity!" she cried.

A faint flush appeared on the vicar's hollow cheeks. Lady Seneschal's crudities always took him aback.

"I hope I shall never set myself above other poor sinners," he began with an uplifted hand, when Gabrielle cried:

"Here's John!"

John Tempest swung into the room; gone was the slouching, melancholy tread as of one who feels his way! The ring of the changed step—she was alone to notice it—was music to Margaret's ear. He stopped short at sight of the unknown black figure. The Reverend Dominick rushed forward to seize him by both hands.

"My dear lad——!" His lucky brothers in religion, whose duties had allowed them to go to the front, always called the soldiers "dear lads"—"this is indeed a joy! This is a happy moment! You may not know me, but I know you."

Gabrielle started to chirp on one side, Lady Seneschal to patter on the other.

"Our kind, good vicar, John," her ladyship was saying. "Old Blenkinsop's successor—you remember old Blenkinsop? Mr. Dominick is a very different kind of person—what we used to call a Puseyite, when I was young."

The while Gabrielle expounded with impatient little jogs at John's elbow (she did not want him to appear too silly and bewildered before the object of her special admiration):

"Mr. Dominick, John!—Mother does not like me to say Father Dominick. Though, really, I don't see why I shouldn't. Isn't a vicar father of his flock? I'm sure he is. Father—yes, I will, Mother—you know you are! The good he does! Oh, don't you remember, I wrote to you about him——"

The vicar raised his long, pale hand.

"Pray, my kind friends, let me introduce myself. Sir

Edward presented me with this living of Thornbarrow, Captain Seneschal, on the death of worthy old Mr. Blenkinsop. I would like to be able to say that I have done my best to show myself worthy of such a trust; but I am too conscious of my shortcomings. What I can say, dear lad, is that in the last terrible years I have shared the joys and sorrows of this dear family. Too, too preponderating, the sorrows, if one may dare say so! But all the more overwhelming, this joy! We have all—the whole parish has—mourned. And now, I say it in all reverence, our mourning has been turned into joy."

John did not consider that the effusion required any reply. The vicar dropped his "dear lad's" hand and murmured to Lady Seneschal:

"On the Sunday when the good news first came through —you remember it was the third after Epiphany?—none of you were at church, if I remember right. What do you say, Miss Gabrielle? You were at early celebration? Ah, yes, you are very faithful. But I was telling Lady Seneschal when you interrupted me that on that memorable Sunday the gospel being the beautiful story of the Centurion, I made an allusion—I drew a parallel. I assure you there was not a dry eye in the church."

"Wasn't it lucky, then, that none of us were there?" said Margaret.

As they were all moving into lunch, the vicar could again show his tact by not hearing this remark.

Conversation at Thornbarrow was always a bedlam kind of business. To the twitter of mother and daughter were added to-day the long-drawn periods of Mr. Dominick, who also liked the sound of his own voice, and who contrived to bear down even his hostess by the sheer

weight of his intoned periods. Gabrielle, admiring Mr. Dominick's flowers of speech almost as much as he did himself, made confusion worse confounded by perpetually repeating or drawing attention to them.

"Mother, you're not listening to Mr. Dominick! Mother, Mr. Dominick says—Mother, Margaret, John, do listen, it's so interesting! Mr. Dominick, say it again——"

"My dear little girl——!" Lady Seneschal would ejaculate, interrupting the chase of her own hare to fling the interjection at her daughter and a pleasant smile at the vicar; after which she would start again, full cry, convinced that all the rites of politeness were accomplished.

Margaret, seeing that Mr. Dominick's well-meant effusiveness was irritating to John, tried to draw it all upon herself. But she was no conversationalist; and, do what she would, the vicar continued to wander back, with inflections of pathos and delicate understanding, to the topics which every soldier most dislikes discussing.

She was heartily glad when lunch was over, and, though the brooding of the leaden sky was beginning to resolve itself into fine rain, she thought longingly of an escape with John into the Chase, with nothing but the honest, wholesome elements to combat. But the vicar lingered over cigarette and coffee; and presently, button-holing her soldier altogether, began to pace the great hall, orating on the many relics of the past which it contained. He rather fancied himself as an antiquary, and was indeed a prominent correspondent of the Wessex Archælogical Society; considered an authority on arrowheads, bone pictures and cinerary urns.

"Ah, very fine, very fine!" He pointed to a Henry VI corslet. "It belonged to the Seneschal who fell on

Bosworth Field, didn't it? Why, Captain Seneschal," here the clerical laugh rang out, "never tell me that I am better informed in the doings of your own ancestors than you are. Oh, you young men!"

He paused and dropped the tone of jocosity to fall into that note of superlative understanding which Margaret found so trying.

"Ah, you who have been in the throes of the world's struggles, forgive the folly of an antiquarian who asks you to spare a thought to faint, far-off unhappy things and battles long ago! For you, indeed, sufficient for the day is the fight thereof."

He glanced at Gabrielle to see if she appreciated the delicacy and whimsical humor with which his profound human insight was shot. Gabrielle was a wholesale admirer; but he had yet to learn that the subtleties and refinements of sentiment glanced off from the gay polish of her surface.

"But they did have helmets and armor!" cried she now. "And, oh, John, what a pity you were not on the German front; you might have brought me back a *Pickelhaube*."

"My dear little girl," cried Lady Seneschal, as usual catching only half a phrase and none of its meaning, "you mustn't talk like that before the vicar. Forgive your enemies—forgive your enemies!"

"Particularly when we are conquerors," said Mr. Dominick, without in the least intending to be humorous. Then, since tactfulness was perhaps his most self-prized quality, he drew attention, with his round gesture, to a row of drinking vessels on the high stone mantelshelf and went on:

"Let us turn our thoughts to symbols of good fellow-

ship. It always has seemed to me, Captain Seneschal, that some of those, ah, convivial relics up there must be almost, if not quite, unique. I have never seen a finer specimen than yonder Bellarmine jug. And, surely, that pottle-stoup would be prized in the South Kensington museum. As for the leathern receptacle, which has so curious a resemblance to a Jack-boot,—and which no doubt, was sedulously used by your Elizabethan forebears, in replenishing their cannikins with ale or sack—that splendid specimen of the Blackjack—in fine——"

He stopped, startled. With a strangled cry, John staggered and sank on the bench beside him, striking his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"My dear boy, what are you about?" exclaimed Lady Seneschal angrily; her first impulse, in all anxieties, being towards irritability.

Margaret flew to her lover's side and tried to lift the hand that was clamped about his forehead. "What is it? Is it your head again? Oh, John, are you in pain?"

His hand was ice cold and rigid. Suddenly he started from her, as if he had only just become aware of her touch; then he cast upon her a look which she could not define, though she saw that it held some terrific conflict of the soul. With that look he got up and strode away. She sprang to follow him; but he swung the door violently back on its hinges and it clapped between them like a willful stroke of separation. The next moment rapid footsteps were heard on the flags of the terrace, and, rushing to the oriel window, she was just in time to see him run, bareheaded, towards the Downs. Mist and rain were drifting in great swathes across the prospect; and in a moment he was lost to sight.

Margaret's brave heart almost failed her as she stepped

down from the oriel back into the hall. She had seen her lover in many phases of depression; she knew him as one whose mental faculties were still half obliterated, but through the worst of it he had never turned from her; she had never had this sense of something dreadfully amiss.

As she advanced into the room again she was aware of a new excitement in Lady Seneschal's and Gabrielle's talk, a new solemnity in the parson's face.

"But he was so much better!" Lady Seneschal was saying in exasperated tones. "What set him off in that extraordinary way? My dear, something must have set him off! He banged the door, and he banged the door. I say, *Quelle mouche l'a piqué?* I say, what midge picked him?"

Gabrielle, wrinkling her pretty forehead, kept repeating in endless iteration, that John had been so very much better, she really had thought he was going to be quite well. Mr. Dominick thought proper to intervene:

"I cannot think," he said, "what has so distressed our dear young soldier, unless, perhaps, it was my imprudently recalling to his mind the great struggle from which we have just emerged. It is a sore trial, dear Lady Seneschal, dear Miss Gabrielle. Sorrow and joy in truth are so strangely blended in this world!"

"Trial!" ejaculated Lady Seneschal. "Between Sir Edward and John, invalid upstairs, invalid downstairs, I wonder I'm not a jabbering idiot. And I say," she went on, while the red signal of anger flew to each cheek, "I say, it does not do to give in to John. I say he's been spoilt. I say, he ought to be made to have self-control!"

"Dear lady, surely this is a case for tolerance, for

patience. The healing, the beautiful influence of home——"

The dear lady swept on with her own theme, ruthlessly stamping on these sentimental blossoms:

"If he wants to stay at home, let him control himself. If he can't, then he must be shut up!"

She tapped her forehead as she spoke. Suddenly her hand dropped and her mouth fell open. She had perceived that Margaret was standing close to her. There was a moment's silence which even the vicar could not fill except by a portentous string of "ahems."

"John is not mad," said Margaret then, quietly.

"My dear, I never said he was. You can't pick out a word of the conversation like that! Everything depends on the contest, doesn't it, Mr. Dominick? The contest, the contest."

"The context," suggested Mr. Dominick with the air of handling a dish.

"Oh, texts, texts!" she cried. "You'd know all about texts, of course." Her mind was fixed on Margaret who was now moving towards the door. "Where are you going to? Margaret, dear little girl, stay a moment! Margaret, where are you off to?"

"I am going to look for John," said Margaret.

CHAPTER XV

HIS NAME WAS JOHN TEMPEST

SHE found him sitting on the edge of the great Barrow, his head between his hands. Some instinct had sent her, straight as a dart, to the place of their happy coming together; the place so associated with all her memories of him. Was it only ten days ago that they had sat in the rosy radiance of sunset and he had held her, and she had known his poor tormented heart at rest upon hers; that she had seen the great flame of his love for her blaze in his eyes while the sunset incarnadined his pale face and tipped his close-cut hair as if with fire? He had looked wonderful to her in that hour, her soldier come to his own again, to his manhood and his manhood's rights; victorious after the protracted agonies, the inhuman ordeals—almost god-like!

What a change over the land! All was blanched, drenched, blotted out; the fine, close gray rain came sweeping on the winds in ghost-like drifts across the long waste of turf; the thorn bushes showed but as wraiths of themselves. But the change over the land was nothing to that which had come upon her lover. He sat, bent, huddled, a broken man, in the midst of the desolation.

She brought herself up at sight of him and put her hand to her side. A sharp pain ran through her; a sense of illimitable misery seemed to flow down from that brooding figure to her. She could scarcely endure it.

"Oh, John!" she cried, springing once more forward, "what is it?"

He leaped to his feet and flung out both his hands as if his first impulse was to ward her off. Then, as she pressed against him, she saw the drawn anguish pass out of his face, to be replaced by a wild ardor.

He caught her in his arms, crushed her to him, kissed her repeatedly, all with a kind of unrestrainable desperate passion that compared with what he had hitherto shown her was as the cataract to the flowing river. It was such a relief to her to have his arms again about her, after those horrible moments in which she had felt an indefinable menace of separation, that she made no effort to withdraw from the fierceness of his grasp. Tears gushed from her eyes. She yielded her wet face to his lips. They clung to each other, swirled about by wind and rain. There was in his kisses an intensity that cried upon her as with stammers and could not express itself. All at once a sob broke from him. She put her hand on his drenched shoulder and drew back to look at him. The flush and the fire were dying from his face, but his eyes still devoured her, claiming and imploring at once. That sob had been tearless.

"What is it?" she insisted.

He began to answer, slowly, painfully, as one mistrustful of words.

"That fellow—the parson—he brought it all back to me!"

"Back to you?"

"Yes. The whole thing. I remember, now—everything!"

"John——?"

"Yes, everything."

"But, John, are you not glad? Doesn't that mean——? Darling, you're shuddering." He had covered his face

with his hands. She heard him mutter: "Horrible, horrible!"

She thought she understood. "Oh, my poor darling!"

Once more she flung her warm, young arms round him. She never could show him enough how completely she understood. In all their life to come, her love would be about him like wings, shielding, warding off those demons of the past that had sprung upon him out of the black to rend him again with old tortures renewed. Her lips against his hands, she breathed the words that rose from her heart:

"Darling, darling, tell me! I know it was dreadful. I do see how dreadful. You had forgotten; it was all lost; and then—something Mr. Dominick said——?"

He interrupted, speaking scarce articulately, almost whispering: "We were Black Jack and Brown John."

His hands had dropped from her; he stood staring straight out on the wilderness.

"Black Jack, Brown John!" she repeated.

For a moment fear swept over her. Was he mad indeed? Then she remembered the pragmatic clergyman showing off his antiquarian knowledge—the old leather drinking vessel—the Blackjack!

"We were always together. We——" He stopped, choking on the words.

"Your comrade!" She was certain that she understood better every moment. To him it was the tragedy repeated; this sudden remembrance of it.

"We were always together," he went on thickly. "I nursed him. He died in my arms."

"Oh, John!"

She could only make a crooning sound of pity. She bent towards him; the rain was dripping from her bright

hair, her face bloomed like a washed flower. All her love looked out of her eyes, compassionate and upholding. There were those who said that Margaret Amber was not pretty, but at that moment she was beautiful, an exquisite soul revealed! He turned, as if he could not bear to see her, stamping his foot, flinging out his hands with a frantic gesture in some extremity of torment that bordered on anger. "Would God," he was crying to himself, "Would God, John Seneschal, I lay in your grave!"

She had seen the brain-storm of the stricken soldier sweep over many a hospital bed and pass. She waited; she even moved a few steps away from him. Turning her back upon him and wringing her hands together, she tried to cast upward at that frowning sky the desperate prayer of humanity abandoned in misery to itself. How to pray? And to whom? That misty vault was impenetrable and weighted with gloom. The heavy sodden airs pressed about her. The world was as some bleached circle of woe.

Then she had a swift mental vision of the figure of the compassionate Christ on her mother's Spanish crucifix; so vivid that it seemed painted on the wall of gray before her. She remembered how she had found a resemblance in John's scarred and suffering head to the drooped, enduring countenance on the Cross. Little as she knew of the Christ, she knew this: He was the Man of Sorrows. Only to a God who had sorrowed could creatures sorrowing turn. It was but an inarticulate cry; yet such as it was, it was a prayer and it strengthened her. She turned and went back to John.

He was standing with his hands over his eyes. Deeply eloquent, that gesture, as of one trying to shut out pic-

tures of horror! "He would like to blindfold himself again," was her thought.

As she touched him, he wheeled around.

"You—you! I thought you had left me!"

His voice was torn between exultation and fear.

"I will never leave you."

"Never, Margaret?"

"No, never."

"My God!" he cried then, "such love is not a thing to be flung away!"

Then he, who was so sparing of words, so reticent of expression, as it were so trammeled by the very strength of his own passion, began to pour out pleadings and protestations—wooing her madly who was already won.

"We knew each other from the very beginning, did we not? When all the rest of the world was a blank to me I knew you and claimed you. We recognized each other, did we not? You, too, were drawn to me as I to you. When I knew nothing, you—you said to me: 'Don't try to think; let us be just John and Margaret. Is it not enough?' you asked. For me it is; it is everything! If it is enough for you, why then, what more can I ever want again? Margaret, Margaret, beloved! Margaret, star, angel!—Margaret, you took the broken man to your heart, you reclaimed the wandering mind, you gave me back to myself in giving me love and hope. Take all I am. My whole life, every pulse and thought. I dedicate myself to you. I am utterly yours!"

Margaret's response was the yielding silence which is perhaps the most eloquent consent. And John Tempest, as he felt her lissome weight against his heart, knew a thousand stabbing pangs in the joy which he would never now, he thought, have the strength to relinquish. Never

again could he taste the bliss of her lips, meet the trust of her loving eyes, hear her rare profound word of endearment, without this anguish! But it was an anguish so precious that everything else on earth was as dust and ashes.

"Were you Brown John?" she asked him later, as the realization of the drenched world drove them homewards. They were on the terrace. He paused and looked away from her towards the Downs.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I was Brown John."

It was the first lie that had crossed his lips.

"And the other—your comrade?"

She spoke very gently, for she could hear in the hoarseness of his accents the return of the oppression which memory brought. But she thought it must ease him in the end to tell her. She knew that nothing can be worse for the haunted mind than self-concentration.

"What was his name?" she asked.

He clenched his hands. The second lie was infinitely more dreadful than the first; yet his whole energies were set on its accomplishment.

"His name was John Tempest," he said. And, as he said it, he felt as if he had buried John Seneschal again—worse, as if he had murdered him!

That night, dreams brought him back to the Anatolian desert. Once again he toiled through yielding sands over harassing bowlders; through scrub; along the pebbly bottom of dry river-beds; up sheer slopes and arid heights; down again into barren valleys, with aching feet and heart, and the certainty of his comrade's doom. He was alone with his living burden as in those last days of the

dread Odyssey. And it was always night under a cold moon, in a cutting wind. John Seneschal was ever more flagging and failing upon him; his weight more than he could drag; the sense of his illness and misery more than he could endure. And there was always before him the terror of the sun which would be upon them the next day; of the danger of missing the ring of stones which marked the well; of the thirst, like the furies of old, forever dogging their steps; "the devils that walk at noonday."

Withal, there was the sense of iteration; the awful foreknowledge in the sleeping mind of catastrophe already accomplished; the certitude that, at a given spot, John Seneschal must die, that John Tempest must dig his grave and bury him in the dawn, before the heat fell again on the world.

And while John Tempest toiled on in his dream, carrying doom, with doom in his soul, there was growing within him a torturing consciousness of guilt. All John Seneschal's wasted hopes, each of his wrung breaths were, somehow, John Tempest's doing; and that grave, which he must dig for the dead man to be put away in, would be wanted because John Tempest had murdered his comrade . . . !

He woke, to find the sweat running cold on his forehead. What a horrible dream! At first he could hardly distinguish between reality and nightmare and, when he had got himself in hand again, the reality seemed scarcely less awful than the dream.

Here he was, in John Seneschal's room; possessed of John Seneschal's birthright; expectant of John Seneschal's heritage; blessed of his father; beloved of his betrothed! Oh, it was this last treachery that cried out to him, as if the shades of night had become voices on every

side. . . . John Seneschal's Margaret! And he had claimed her, knowingly, willfully, as his own!

How it had all come upon him! The moment that word had dropped upon his ear, Black Jack—the old mocking name bestowed upon him by the brave tragic company, the company of honest fellows of which he told himself he was not worthy to have been a member—it had been like an explosion in the midst of his brain; a terrific scattering light; a noise, a reverberation worse than any bomb of them all! Then, settling into perspective, horribly vivid, crowding upon him, essential facts and irrelevant details, abnormally, devilishly clear—the whole forgotten story had flashed out!

He had allowed himself to be jockeyed and bullied into a monstrous fraud! His own frantic passion had betrayed his honesty, when the single truth, "John Seneschal is dead," had always emerged like a black rock out of a tormented sea. Now he had indeed buried him! And, with the friend who had trusted him and died in his arms, he had buried John Tempest's honor. Yes, the die was cast. He would not, could not, go back on it. So far, he was doing no wrong to any one but himself. How he might deal later on, with the heir-at-law, it would be time enough to think when the last of the Seneschals, the bereaved and cheated father, should have been laid to his rest.

To come to a settled resolution, be it good or bad, brings a certain strength to the mind swinging on uncertainty. John Tempest lay down again on John Seneschal's pillow, folded his arms and composed himself once more to sleep.

"I can't go back. There is no going back for me. You see that, and understand, over there, wherever you

are, don't you, Brown John? I'd have given my life for you, you know that. I'd give it again, a hundred times, to bring you back, if I could! I'm not robbing you, Brown John; I'm only taking what's been given me. Good God, isn't it almost as if you had given it to me yourself?"

As he lay, his arms crossed, unconsciously pressing down the stormy leaping of his heart, his eyes deliberately shut, it seemed to him, between sleep and waking, as if John Seneschal stood by his side, looking down at him; his gaze immensely kind and pitying, his face pale and sad, yet luminous. Comfort stole through every vein, like cordial. "He is not angry with me; I am forgiven," said John Tempest.

In his half sleep, he dared to think all condoned. He fell into dreams again, from this semi-consciousness. And again he was in the desert. He was sitting beside John Seneschal and watching the Buffer walk away to what he knew was certain death, in yonder Turkish town, the flat roofs of which showed white and yellow beneath the curve of the ridge. He knew that, when that strong, square-shouldered figure, swinging along in the blazing light, should have gone a little way along the road, it would turn to wave farewell, and that he would have a last sight of the Buffer's steady brown face and of his far-away blue eyes. The Buffer turned and looked back; and John Tempest started up in bed with a groan.

He was wide awake once more; awake with a better understanding, a knowledge more dreadfully clear of himself, present, past and future, than had yet come to him. He had seen what he was in the eyes of the Buffer. He was weighed, judged, rejected in a single glance. All his sophistries, all the dear pleadings of his passion, were stripped from him. From beyond the grave, the gallant,

great-hearted gentleman who had been his leader had cast him forever outside the circle of his high esteem.

It was a strange resolution that John Tempest came to at last, after hours of fierce struggle with himself. He sat on the window ledge—return to that bed of horrors he could not—and saw the faint pearl-hued dawn stretch over the Thornbarrow downs. What a place of mystery it was! Haunting and alluring—how it had haunted and held him! He had no gross material clinging to the possession of it, he knew that. There was but one impulse in his soul—constant, reiterate, compelling like the leading theme in a great symphony—towards which the whole of his being converged: Margaret!

He went over to the writing-table and drew from that locked drawer the pocketbook, John Seneschal's pocketbook, which some curious instinct, rather than any deliberate intention, had kept him from touching since the first evening when he had shut it away there, as if he could shut away with it the intangible anguish of his past. The leaves fell apart in his hands and the picture of the girlish face which he had last seen in the fierce radiance of an Asiatic sunrise showed ethereally in the first pale beams of this English morning.

Margaret! So had she looked at John Seneschal, with clear, almost childlike eyes and sweet, defiant mouth. Ah!—all his blood rose in him in a wave of triumph—the Margaret that John Tempest knew was different. Her eyes were deep, woman's eyes, full with the knowledge of her love. And her lips, her lips——! He flung down the book.

Margaret! He could not give up Margaret! Yet neither could he carry on life under the burden of the sentence pronounced upon him by the eyes of a dead man

in a dream. He sought desperately for an issue. Then he remembered Margaret's father—quiet, spare, moving as it were in an orbit of self-reliance and serene strength, who had said so little and conveyed so much just by a hand-clasp and a grave glance.

He would go to Margaret's father. He would tell him his singular and racking story; how fate had made a sport of him, and love a traitor; how he had been trapped into giving his word of honor to act a part of dishonor, to deceive a dying man; how even Margaret, in her trustful love and the strong simplicity of her undoubting faith, had guided him, step by step, witless, along the path—the path all too full of beauty, all too entrancing, which led to this precipice!

CHAPTER XVI

LORD AMBER GIVES ADVICE

LORD AMBER'S life was ruled on the lines of the business man. Three times a week he motored to his offices in London; spent the night in a corner of the mansion in Grosvenor Square, to motor back to Vale Royal for tea next day. He was always the center of some tremendous undertaking, the pivot on which turned some colossal engine of fortune. He had no partner, trusting no man enough to take him into his innermost council, but there was scarcely a place of commercial interest on the globe in which there was not some sharp-witted agent of his, alert to the cabled whisper of his will.

He was sitting to his early abstemious breakfast, the newspaper propped up before him, while with absent hands he cracked an egg, when a footman entered. The man had a scared look.

"A gentleman has ridden over to see you, my lord. He did not answer when I asked what name, but I think it is Captain Seneschal."

Lord Amber got up quickly.

"Where did you leave him?"

"In the hall, my lord."

The financier swept the servant out of his path with an abrupt gesture, and himself went in search of his visitor. John was standing on the threshold, both arms rigidly dropped, his cap in one hand. He looked like an orderly

before his chief; like one who has ridden hard to bring dispatches of importance and who knows that their contents are disaster.

"My dear boy," said Lord Amber, "come in!"

He took him by the elbow and drew him into the breakfast parlor. Not a detail of the young man's appearance escaped the quiet eye under the bushy gray eyebrow. He had seen men condemned to death bear a less stricken countenance. John had not offered his hand, nor attempted a word of explanation.

"Sit down—you have something to tell me, I see. But before we begin to talk, I want to know one thing: Have you breakfasted?"

"No, sir."

"No, I thought not. Not a word, then, till you have had a cup of coffee." He pressed the button on the table. "I drink tea myself, but there's always coffee going when there's a French chef on the premises.—Coffee, Thomas, immediately.—You rode over from Thornbarrow? It is a glorious morning after yesterday's rain."

He saw that his visitor was quite incapable of following his words, but he knew, too, the composing effect of a leisurely voice and manner.

"I ought to apologize for coming at this very early hour," faltered John at last. "But I felt I could not wait——"

Lord Amber interrupted: "One moment. I am considerably older than you are and I ought to have learned to take the ups and downs of life by this time. You and I will have some breakfast first. I am not going to hear, fasting, nor are you going to tell me, fasting, the business

that has brought you here with such a face on. Ah—here's the coffee!"

As John put down his empty cup and looked across at his host, he felt as if his unbearable burden had already become, somehow, lightened; as if a strong hand had been put out to help him to carry it. Certainly what he had thought would be so difficult, so impossible to say; what he had vainly endeavored to arrange into words during hours of fierce riding, now leaped from his mouth, almost as if it were not agony but relief to speak them.

"My memory has come back——" he blurted out. "Everything came back, all at once, yesterday! I—I know who I am. I have no business here, among you all."

Lord Amber let the lids drop over his eyes for a moment. It was the only sign of emotion he gave. When he lifted his gaze again, its kindliness was in no wise diminished; it had deepened instead into pity, but it had gathered something else, too, a watchful intensity.

"Take it easy, my boy." Suddenly, into the grave face there came a flash. "How does Margaret take it?"

John swung himself round on his chair with a desperate movement and flung his arm across his eyes.

"I have not told her."

There was silence in which the flicker of the little flame under the tea urn seemed to shrink. Then Lord Amber said, and his voice was subtly altered, as if some element of strength had gone from it:

"You had perhaps no opportunity?"

John wheeled back to confront him, dropped his concealing hand and looked at his questioner, lips parted, but speechless.

"You could have told her?" Lord Amber's manner

had something in it of the compassion of the judge towards one whom he may have to sentence for a crime with which he yet almost sympathized. He answered himself. "I see. You could not bring yourself to it. You have come to me; perhaps it is best."

He pushed his chair away from the table and began to pace the room. He was touched on his single vulnerable point. He would have seen millions go with a greater composure than know his daughter's happiness even threatened. He liked John. Social advantages for Margaret was a secondary consideration to him; he asked one thing for her, that she should have, in a sad world, the best it can give: marriage with a man she loved, with a man, in essentials, worthy of her. Was this dark, tormented boy worthy, or was he not? That was the sole question.

The father went to and fro, with measured step, chin sunk on his breast, lost in profound cogitation. Presently he came back to John and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"You are a good, honest fellow," he said.

"Oh, my God!" cried John, with a sob in his throat. "No, don't say it! I am a scoundrel! Yesterday—yesterday, it is true that when it all came upon me, I did try to fly from her, I did try to put her from me, but she came after me, and then when I tried to tell her—I lied!"

"That's a pity," said Lord Amber slowly; but he did not remove his hand.

"I lied to Margaret—twice!" repeated John in a loud, hoarse voice, and, as he lifted his eyes, the other saw illimitable misery in them. He walked away again from the sight for he wanted to keep an unbiased mind. He had to think clearly and quickly; and pity is, of all emotions, one the most calculated to confuse issues. At

length he brought himself up short and said, in quite a new tone and manner:

"I would like you to come into my study. We shall not be disturbed there. There are some things I must say to you: things I must show you." Then, dropping the sharp decisiveness as of one bent on rapid action, he added gently: "You came to me for help. I am going to help you, all I can."

A vague, feeble hope began to move in John's heart. Yet it was almost worse, he thought, that there should be life in all that dead despair. It could only mean a new death.

Lord Amber brought his guest into a small octagonal room which opened upon a garden. It was a severe and peaceful place, furnished with the austerity that marked all the millionaire's personal tastes. He sat down by the writing-table, and motioned John into a chair in the full light of the window.

"Now," said he, "I want you to answer a few questions. Till yesterday you had not the faintest idea of who you were?—Is that so?"

"That is so."

"Nevertheless you had a strong impression that you were not the man for whom every one insisted on taking you?"

"Yes.—No one would believe me."

"No one would believe you. Not even my daughter. She thought she recognized you; but—" Lord Amber's lips took a scornful twist—" '*One thin, dark, young man is very much like another thin, dark, young man*'—she made a mistake."

"She made a mistake," repeated John Tempest.

The elder man shot at him a glance in which, like a hawk, he seemed to unhood the pupil of his eyes.

"Supposing she had not made a mistake? Supposing, after all, that you are John Seneschal?—let me speak, please—is it not the only reasonable explanation of your own recognition of Margaret?—your intimate knowledge of Thornbarrow and its inmates, not to speak of your having been found with the disk of John Seneschal round your neck and the papers of John Seneschal in your pocket?"

"Ah, but there is another explanation." Tempest spoke with a kind of eager despair. "John Seneschal was my comrade. He was always talking to me of Thornbarrow, and of——" He broke off.

"Of Margaret?"

"Of Margaret. I took his papers to bring them home. I even took his clothes and his disk because he had made me promise to do so——"

"He made you promise to do so!—Why?"

"I had no uniform. I escaped in the clothes of one of our Turkish guards. If I had been caught I should have been shot as a spy. He knew that."

Lord Amber's face showed no emotion at these replies. One might have even thought they were no news to him. Maintaining his quiet manner which, like a steady hand controlling a nervous horse, kept the young man's agitation in check, he resumed:

"You have omitted to tell me who you think you are."

The other looked at him with wide-open eyes for a second before replying. It was a gaze proud and straight.

"I *know* I am John Tempest," he answered. And there was pride, too, in the voice; a defiance for truth.

The elder man drew a long breath through his nostrils;

the corners of his mouth relaxed. He pivoted on his chair —he had been sitting sideways to the writing table— and drawing from his pocket a bunch of keys hanging from a chain round his waist unlocked and opened a drawer. A small bundle of letters fastened by an elastic band lay on the top of other papers. He picked it up; and, without at first unfastening it, began to read out from notes, jotted on the topmost sheet:

"John Lionel Tempest, born January 18, 1892; only son of the Revd. Lionel Henry Tempest, D.D., of Littleton Rectory, Cambs, and Bertha Harding, his wife." He paused, cast his flashlight glance at the listener, and without waiting for any other confirmation than what he saw on the young man's face, proceeded: "Went to Harrow from preparatory school, 1904; removed on death of father in 1906, by his uncle, Mr. Harding (head of the firm of Harding, Holroyd and Spinnel, Manchester), who placed him in a commercial school with the intention of taking him into his own firm."

"But—how can you possibly know all this?"

Lord Amber smiled for the first time that morning. He slightly raised his voice to deprecate interruption and pursued:

"Young John Lionel Tempest, rebelling against his uncle's plans and showing no taste whatever for a commercial life, he was, on his mother's death, permitted by Mr. Harding—who, by the way, is now Sir Seymour Harding, as I ought to have remembered—to choose a career for himself. His maternal uncle having, metaphorically, washed his hands of him, John Tempest entered Sandhurst and eventually passed into the Indian Staff corps. (John—I make no mistake anyhow, in calling you John—sit quiet; I have not yet done.) He had been in

India for about three years when the war broke out. He was sent to Mesopotamia with the Indian contingent; was a prisoner at Kut, transferred eventually to Kara Hissar in Anatolia. Later on, with five other officers belonging to various regiments, among whom was John Seneschal, also of the Indian Army, he was removed from the great camp. On the way to some other destination the whole party was, through Turkish incapacity or malignity, stranded in some insignificant village."

Here the speaker paused; selected one letter from his bundle, unfolded it, and handed it to his astounded companion.

"Read that, please."

John took it. It was a big block-sheet, stamped with an elaborate business head-line. A vague sense of familiarity with the writing made him look for the signature first: "Yours faithfully, Seymour Harding." He stared back at Lord Amber.

"Read it," repeated this latter, and had the jerk of a laugh. "It explains itself."

The letter began with extreme formality:

The Lord Amber,
My Lord,

In reply to yours of the fifteenth instant, I hasten to assure you that it would have given me the greatest pleasure to afford you any information in my power with regard to the fate of the unfortunate party of officers who escaped from imprisonment in Anatolia, and of whom, only one survivor, Captain Seneschal, reached England. My nephew, Captain John Lionel Tempest, was not among the fugitives as you erroneously suppose. He was found dead in the prison, on the very morning of the escape.

Here John Tempest, who had stood up to read, put out a hand to feel for his chair, and let himself fall into it again. He flung out the close-written sheet at arm's

length and sat staring at it; and then turned distracted eyes upon his companion.

"It is fantastic!" he exclaimed, broke into laughter and struck his forehead. "It's like a ridiculous farce. We drugged the poor chap, the Turkish guard, in whose uniform, I told you, I escaped. We made him blind drunk and put opium into the drink besides. I changed clothes with him; and, by George—yes, my memory has come back with a vengeánce, I can tell you—I hung my disk round his neck. That commandant humbug must jolly well have known it was not me, of course. But—I suppose he wanted to hush up the business. He——"

Lord Amber interrupted:

"This is all very interesting," said he, "and I should like to hear it one day. But just now it is your uncle's letter which I wish to discuss with you. Please read to the end."

John gave a snort like a shying horse; frowned, and obeyed.

Besides the usual War Office communication, I have had, since the cessation of hostilities, a most civil letter from the Turkish Commandant of the Prison in which he informed me of the occurrence. He wrote in French and seemed altogether a superior kind of person. I was glad to be able to discharge my debt to him for the expenses incurred for the poor boy's funeral and the headstone he has had thoughtfully placed on the grave. He sent me my nephew's disk, and what little relics belonging to him he was able to gather. You will perhaps allow me to add, my lord, that our natural sorrow has been much mitigated by the very gratifying testimony which we have received from my nephew's colonel and other officers of his regiment. Very possibly the detail may have escaped your notice in the press, nevertheless it was duly reported in the principal newspapers, I believe, that our nephew, Captain John Tempest of the Indian Army, was granted a posthumous V.C. for a fine act of daring on the Tigris. My second daughter received this valued token from His Majesty's hand; though not perhaps nearest of kin, as the dear lad's fiancée.

"But this is grotesque!" cried John when he came to this point. "They were a couple of romping schoolgirls —they would never have a thing to say to me. I never—we never—why I don't even know which was Rose and and which Evangeline!"

Lord Amber laughed, a silent laugh.

"My dear John, you don't understand, you have not got the commercial instinct, Miss Evangeline has. (It was Miss Evangeline.) You and the V.C. have become an asset to her. And she has made use of it too. She has since engaged herself, it seems very prosperously engaged herself, to the son of a local magnate. However, she does not concern us. Will you give me back that letter, please?—Thank you. You should know your uncle fairly well; but perhaps I know him better, though I have only seen him for about half an hour.—Yes, I went down to Manchester on purpose, I had an interview with Sir Seymour. He was very obliging; he showed me all the evidence connected with—" he paused, "with his nephew John Tempest's death. And there's one thing quite certain; he will never admit that a young man so advantageously deceased could possibly in any circumstances come disadvantageously to life again."

"Disadvantageously!" There had been a stress on the word which John's ear, sharpened by self-torment, had been quick to catch.

Lord Amber enveloped him with a large reflective gaze before speaking again. Then he said—and there was kindness in the level voice which robbed the speech of offense, though it perhaps only accentuated its painfulness to the listener:

"Ask yourself what kind of a figure you would cut in the eyes of a purse-proud, pragmatic, self-important in-

dividual like Sir Seymour! It is not as if a nephew had come to life opportunely all in a halo of romance, in the glory of his V.C. and desperate adventure. That might have happened. Then you might have been—excuse my frankness—a first-class advertisement to Sir Seymour Harding. But if you go to him now with that story of yours, that improbable and disagreeable story, you merely appear in the light of a detected impostor."

John made an inarticulately protesting ejaculation.

"I say," repeated the other with his unrelenting kindliness of look and voice, "even if every one here supported you and stood by you—and you know, John, if it came to it, what support you would be likely to get from Thornbarrow—even I say, with the utmost championship, you would cut such a sorry figure, that Sir Seymour, possessing irrefutable evidence of his nephew's demise, would repudiate you as a deliberate fraud—or, more likely, as a madman."

John Tempest dropped his head into his hands. It was a gesture of despair. The most cruel trick of fate, an unexpected, a passing weakness of his own poor heart, had betrayed him into grievous treachery; he had been false, were it but for an hour, to friend and to beloved. And his punishment had begun: he was beaten as it were with scorpions! This man who had seemed so kind, so helpful, was stripping from him, one by one, the last shred of self-esteem, of hope. But he was Margaret's father: it was fitting.

Above his bent head, the voice went on. And what it next said was so utterly unexpected that John sat, for a while transfixed, unable to believe the evidence of his senses.

"And upon my word," the financier continued, "if I

were Sir Seymour, I think I should be much inclined to take the same point of view.—Here's a dathered young man, just recovering from a head wound which has scattered his wits, turning up with a cock-and-bull story of mistaken identity. He has been recognized by his family and registered by the authorities as John Seneschal. He has proved himself to be John Seneschal, to the satisfaction of his own people. There are, apparently, uncontrovertible proofs, that he is John Seneschal. But his crazy pate has taken a sudden twist. He declares that he is one John Tempest whom I, Sir Seymour Harding, know to be gloriously dead for his country; whom I and my family have mourned with due patriotic pomp. Let the Seneschals look to the delusions of their heir, and prevent him from molesting other people.—I think Sir Seymour Harding has a good case. Don't you? So good a case that, as I say, I am inclined to agree with him!"

John, after that blank, unbelieving stare, drew his chair back, as if a chasm had opened before him.

"You don't believe me!" he said hoarsely. "Am I to understand that?"

"I think one tale as wild as the other. A trifle wilder, really."

The millionaire was smiling.

"You mean——" John jerked his chair backwards again.

"Now look here, my lad," Lord Amber's tone was brisk. "You came to me for help. I am giving it to you, the best kind of help one man can give another. I am getting you to look at your true position. It just comes to this: If you push this discovery—this discovery you think you've made—to its logical conclusion,

you create between yourself and Lady Seneschal an enmity which will be an active and malignant force. I know that lady. If she is obliged to give up in you her dearest hopes, you will be trumpeted far and wide as the vilest wretch that ever imposed upon a mother's trusting heart. Again, think! Go to Sir Seymour with your story and the character Lady Seneschal will give you, and see if he'll acknowledge you! You will find yourself a nameless wanderer on the face of the earth, if indeed you do not somehow, between two such self-seekers, find yourself before long safely housed in an asylum."

John's chair was against the wall; he could not retreat any more. But the soul in his eyes was drawing back, back. He felt what was coming.

"Thank you," he said at last, with dry lips. "You certainly have shown me my position.—What then am I to do?"

The last phrase was barely audible. Lord Amber leaned back in his office chair, playing with his keys. He let his eyelids drop over his watchful gaze; a faint smile hovered about his austere lips.

"Why should you do anything? I have told you that yours is a wild tale; and I have shown you that it will not be believed. Now, look here, John, you have had a bad head wound, and you lost your memory. In the best medical opinion, you have been a prey to delusions. You have not furnished, you cannot furnish, any proof that all this is not a new phase of delusion. If I," said Lord Amber, fixing his eyes compellingly on the young man, "am willing to regard everything that you have just confided to me merely as another delusion, cannot you leave it at that? And—" he dropped his eyelids again, "be grateful?"

"Lord Amber——!" John sprang to his feet.

"What is there to prevent you?"

"But—but—My God!—You say this to me—and Margaret? There is Margaret!"

"Margaret." The elder man lay back in the same attitude, and only a close observer might have noticed that the thick gray wave of hair, which he wore brushed back from his forehead, lifted as if stirred by an unfelt wind. "Margaret?" he repeated. "Did I not understand you to say that you had already taken an irrevocable step on this point, with her?"

"Irrevocable?" echoed the other, miserably.

"Perhaps I am thinking most of Margaret. Why should she be made to suffer because of"—his accents grew hard, threatening—"what may be another delusion?"

There was a long pause. Then the financier, still jingling his keys, proceeded, with a return to those businesslike, alert tones which, with him, meant prompt action:

"You have some kind of qualm thinking of the next heir perhaps?—By the way I may tell you that this same Mr. Teddy Seneschal-Smith is very much on your tracks; in fact it was he who put it into my head to collect all the information on the subject of the late Captain Tempest, my knowledge of which has so much surprised you. You can leave me to deal with Mr. Seneschal-Smith. I am a rich man. If it's any satisfaction to you, I'll see that in time he gets the value of Thornbarrow, one way or another. What would he do with such an estate? Play ducks and drakes with it. I'll let him have the capital. There are a hundred ways. He's been to see me two or three times. I've only got to put him on to

—a few things, and see that he gets on. My conscience!——" The Scotsman smiled mirthlessly, showing his strong teeth like a dog. "I can deal with Mr. Teddy!" He broke off. Then: "What do you say?" he cried sharply.

"I say I am going."

"Going, my lad?"

The young man turned from the door, magnificent in anger.

"I had rather blow my brains out!"

"Pooh! What are you going to do? Talk sense."

John straightened himself against the door and lifted his chin.

"I am going to tell the truth," he cried loudly and clearly; then he added with a look of fierce repudiation which gave the homely saw a driving personal application: "Tell the truth and shame the devil!"

Again Lord Amber closed his eyes and drew the deep breath of one who gratefully inhales fresh air. Presently, he said, very quietly:

"You can't do that—John Tempest."

"Can't?—Why not?"

John had been so beaten about, so twisted and tormented for the millionaire's purpose, that he failed to catch the profound significance of the name on his lips.

"Because, my dear boy, you have given your word not to do so while Sir Edward lives."

John struck his forehead. "My God, I had forgotten!"

"You must go on—and what's more, John, you must go on also where Margaret is concerned, until Sir Edward's death releases you. Come, that's not too much to ask. In fact, I don't ask: I insist. I claim it of

your honor. I'll see that it's not made impossible to you. I'll get her away, back here to-day, and up to London. I can manage it. When Sir Edward dies—it won't be long——"

"When Sir Edward dies," repeated John. All heat had fallen from him. He was once again dominated, almost hypnotized by the elder man's determination.

"Then I trust you will have thought better of the business." Lord Amber had got up and, standing close to his visitor, smiled at him with his eyes. "Come, John, it is a bargain for the present, anyhow. Your hand on it."

John found his hand wrung in the grasp that even now communicated a strange cordial warmth to his whole being. He went forth, with a whisper in his ear:

"Don't fling away your happiness. Remember I stand by you!"

Margaret's father—this devil incarnate, this man of essential dishonesty, the most insidious tempter that ever crossed the path of a wavering soul? Was it possible! Margaret's father!

He was carrying away from the Star-Chamber at Vale Royal, confusion worse confounded, fresh doubts, horror and misery, yet just one light of certainty: He must go on—till Sir Edward died.—He must go on, even with Margaret!

Lord Amber, his head on his hand, sat listening to the footfalls of John Tempest's slowly pacing horse.

"He'll do," he was saying to himself. "He'll do." And then: "The difficulty will be with Margaret."

CHAPTER XVII

THE MESSAGE IN THE POCKETBOOK

MARGARET started from the profound unbroken sleep which was the birthright of her healthy young nature. The light of a fine morning was filtering in through her curtains; these were swinging to a fresh rain-washed breeeze, for the windows of her room were never shut. There was an immense musical clamor of waking birds. Yet no wind nor song had roused her; what had surprised her out of her vague delightful dream had been the ring of horse's hoofs, dropping on the flags of the courtyard.

She sat up in bed and listened intently. Now she heard them again, quickened and muffled, the rider was on the grass! And now—there was no mistaking that crisp rhythm—the horse was being galloped across the Downs at a great rate. She jumped out of bed and ran to the window. Her room was set high in one of the gables and from it she had a wide view over the interminable stretch of billowing downlands which formed the park of Thornbarrow. She was just in time to catch a flying vision of horse and rider, black-drawn against the lovely pale luminosity of the breaking May morning; to see them rise over the crest of the great Barrow, and disappear as if they had leaped into the daffodil sky.

John!—She had known it was John, even in her silly, happy dream. He must have been up before dawn. Why should he be riding away like that, as if he were hunted?

Why should she feel, suddenly, so anxious, so abominably desolate, as if he were riding out of her life? What, after all, more natural than that, being wakeful, he should like a canter through the exquisite morning hour? It was the very thing she would have liked herself. . . . She was getting idiotic and superstitious! She shook herself, calling upon her sanity, her common sense, her sound healthy balance of mind and body to fight this nonsense.—Certainly Thornbarrow was a haunted place!

Now she decided that she would dress at once, and go out in her turn; get a drink of milk at the home farm, perhaps, and take her knockabout car for a spin. John should not altogether have a matutinal crow over her. And oh—oh, what a morning! How could any one think of bed again?

She had just pulled on her jumper after a rapid toilet, with the smile of artificial gayety still on her lips, when she was startled by a rapid tapping on the panels of her door, followed by the appearance of Gabrielle in her dressing-gown. Gabrielle with light hair disheveled, small scared eyes in a small pinched face.

"Margaret—Margaret, Margaret! Oh, my dear, how did you know? Who told you?"

"Told me what?"

"Oh, my dear, father! Father's so ill! Didn't you know? Seeing you up and dressed, I thought—what? What do you say?"

Margaret believed she understood now.

"It was for the doctor John was going, then?" she cried.

"John! Do you know where he is? Oh, Margaret, be quick and tell me! We've been looking everywhere for him.—Father's been asking and asking for him."

"I saw him ride away, half an hour ago."

Gabrielle wrung her hands.

"It's too provoking! It's too tiresome! Just this morning of all others! Oh, my dear, mother thought—I suggested—it came to me like a flash—it would save time if you'd take your little car and go yourself to fetch Weatherby. By the time we had them on the telephone—my dear, you know what the village post-office is, this time of the morning, how they sleep!—it would take us hours and hours—and our car is out of order—there never was anything so unlucky!"

Again she wrung her hands. She looked a mere wisp of humanity, singularly ill-constructed to express anything approaching to tragedy. Nevertheless Margaret understood that she was in an extremity of emotions in which fear predominated.

"I'll go," said she, "at once." As she flung on her hat and motor coat, she questioned rapidly: "What's happened?"

"Oh, my dear, hemorrhage. Wilkins came running for mother ten minutes ago. He says it's dreadfully serious, and if they can't stop it——"

She paused and took up the thread beyond the significant gap.

"Wilkins knows, you know. He's a trained medical attendant."

The two girls had, by this time, reached the narrow stairs that led down from the gable rooms. Margaret started running. Outside Sir Edward's door she crossed Lady Seneschal, scarlet-faced in a flowing cambric dressing gown, and the medical valet, livid and unshorn, in coat and trousers hastily flung on over pajamas. Bare-

feet in his slippers, his whole appearance expressed the utmost urgency; yet the pair were in high wrangle.

"And I say I must have the ice, Lady Seneschal. I must have pails of it, and you must send to the ice house!"

"And I say, ice is nonsense, nonsense! The treatment is hot water. Hot as he can bear it. Do you think I don't know, Wilkins, you fool, how hemorrhage ought to be dealt with?"

"I'm going for the doctor," called Margaret, rushing by.

Their voices contending in accents none the less fierce for being subdued, pursued her as she flew down the main stairs. "He'll bleed to death, between them!" she thought, and was glad that she had been given the task of bringing help; for she knew that nobody but herself would dare the risk of the speed she meant to take that morning.

Dr. Weatherby received the summons with what may be described as a cheerful pessimism. He shook his head and pursed his lips and while Mrs. Weatherby prepared a cup of cocoa, leisurely collected drugs from his surgery; opposing to Margaret's fevered impatience the composed good humor of the professional man who knows that, whatever may be the event, to hurry is a doctor's greatest mistake.

The virtue of this axiom was made even more manifest to him, when he found himself on the two-seater, driven by Miss Amber at a rate which made him feel (as he afterwards expressed it to his wife) as if he were being shot out of a gun. Later he was fond of boasting

that it had been a record drive. "We did it, the whole three miles, under five minutes!"

Margaret never knew whether Lady Seneschal or Wilkins had carried the victory as to treatment; but Sir Edward was still alive, and the worst symptom had been arrested when she returned with Dr. Weatherby.

This latter presently emerged from the sick chamber in some fuss and indignation. Where was Captain Seneschal? Sir Edward had rallied; there might be a chance of getting him round the corner, just for the time being. But he was asking for his son. They could not make him understand that John was out. And indeed, it was very strange. Where was the young man? Sir Edward was on the fret. He was disturbed, he was restless. Dr. Weatherby would answer for nothing unless he were satisfied by his son's presence.

"Where the dickens is he? What the dickens has sent him off like this?"

Gabrielle sought Margaret again. Had she any idea? Had John dropped any hint?

Margaret was in the breakfast parlor, drinking a cup of coffee. She put it down and looked, her nostrils dilating, her lips compressed, wide-eyed at the speaker before replying:

"I can't think. No, I can't imagine."

"It's too bad of him!" Gabrielle fretfully stamped. "It is too cruel of him! It's—it's monstrous! Father can't settle, and Weatherby says if it comes on again——"

She paused, with her conventional objection to expressing the plain inevitable truth. By the Gabrielles of this world the word death is mentioned as little as possible.

Margaret stood, communing with herself. There was a desperate anxiety in her heart; it concerned, not the dying man, but the strong rider whom she had seen leap from the hilltop out of her sight.

"I will go to John's room," she said at length. "I will see if he has left any message—any letter."

She spoke more to herself than to her companion; and, without waiting for comment, went straight upon her quest. On the threshold of her lover's room, she paused. She almost dreaded to see on his writing table the white square of some addressed envelope. Though why indeed, after all, should he leave a message before starting for a morning ride?

She entered slowly. No, there was nothing on the old stained green leather table-top, except the battered blotter which the last governess had presented to "little John."

He had been at the table, though. Here was a drawer left open—an empty drawer! She took up the blotter and turned over the stained blotting paper. Nothing.

With a sigh of relief she straightened herself and looked round. What a tossed bed! Poor boy, he had slept badly. That accounted for his early rising and his desire to plunge into morning airs. Why had he slept badly? And why was he not yet returned? She had not had time to put on her own watch. But his wrist watch was ticking on the table beside the bed. After all, it was only half-past nine. He must have been in a great hurry to get away, or he would have remembered to buckle on his watch. . . . Why had John ridden out like that, in such a hurry?

She went to the window to gaze once more on the spot where she had seen him disappear. He had seemed to

her to be riding like one hunted. A moment she stood, straining her eyes, trying to call that flying figure back to sight upon the Downs; calling it to come back, to leap out of the sky line instead of into it, to gallop towards her, instead of away from her! But the serene bright stretch showed no sign of living creature, not even the antlered head of a deer; nothing but the cloud shadows on the silver green of the grass and the dusky hollows where the hazel copses grew thick, holding darkness even on a May morning.

She gave an impatient sigh and was about to turn away, when her glance fell on something lying in the window seat—a pocketbook—John's pocketbook, her gift, which he had tried to make her take back that second day of his home-coming in his brain-sickness—and which she, giving herself once more along with it, had forced again upon him with tears. Could he have left some message after all? If not, why should it lie there; the pocketbook which contained such sacred things?

She sat down on the window seat, and took the shabby leather case into her hand.

The moment she did so, out of it came to her an emanation of death. Her brave spirit was enveloped, saturated; it was like a blackness overwhelming, blotting out every light and joy of the world. Her soul sank in it as the drowning man into dark icy waters. Death was in it. Death! She had sat helpless, through the agonies of too many soldiers, not to recognize the shadow cast by the wings of the terrible angel. But it had never been quite like this to her before; piercingly personal, seizing her very vitals. This death message was to her own soul, and her soul was appalled. It shrank away within her.

She sat like one paralyzed, staring at the case.

She had sent it to John in India with a renewal of their vows on that twenty-first birthday when she had found herself legally free to ratify her choice. The solid morocco had been clamped with silver at the corners. (Three of those clamps were gone, she mechanically noticed.) It had been the perfection of its kind; a wonder of ingenuity, contrived with several compartments and cunning pockets. There had been a large ivory tablet, and under that Margaret had slipped her photograph; a photograph specially taken for the occasion, of which there had been only the single copy—for John! That ivory tablet must have been lost, for the photograph had been uncovered, she remembered, when her poor boy had tried to return it to her, that morning after his home-coming.

It was John Seneschal's character to be secretive, most especially where his love was concerned. And it was because she knew this that she had planned the triumph of her present to him: a hiding place so ingeniously devised that even he would not have found it had she not written him full directions.

"Under the ivory tablet and under the photograph, where it all looks like plain leather, there is a quite, quite secret pocket, John darling, and the whole panel can be shifted, if you draw the left-hand top clamp aside.

At twenty-one Margaret Amber had been still very childish. She had hidden away in that *cachette* a lock of her hair and a half sheet of paper on which she had written with her blood: "*Margaret will always love John.*"

As from an immense distance, these memories flowed

now into her mind like slowly gathering, slowly breaking waves. The blackness was not gone, nor the enveloping, smothering atmosphere of death; but her own courage had begun to rise and react. Reason spoke: "The knowledge of the deathbed downstairs has upset your nerves. You were already overstrained, unduly anxious about John's morning ride; tired with your mad motor drive." None of these arguments convincing her soul, reason shifted ground: "And if there is agony of death about that pocketbook, is it astonishing? Don't you know that your John, alone, came alive out of the journey of death? Had he not four gallant companions, and must he not have seen them all go to their doom? Was it not only last night that memory, coming back with a rush, brought with it such visions that his brain could scarcely bear it—that it was all you could do to soothe and calm him, that the night became a torment to him and that you saw him ride away this morning over the hill, as one hunted?"

Here reason spoke words that could be listened to. Margaret heaved a long unconscious sigh; then, deliberately, she opened the pocketbook; and once again the blast of death rushed out upon her.

But with it came a lightning conviction: Let her but look further and she would understand.

On one side, her own face, on the other, every pocket and compartment bulging with her letters. Dear John! So, he had always kept as many of them as he could about him! The sight of that face of hers, brimming with young hope, the glimpses of those stray words of love and constancy—turned her sick. She did not know why yet; but the time had come, she felt, that she must know. If her fingers trembled as she tore out her own

portrait, shifted the clamp that worked the secret pocket and then drove the leather panel from its place, it was from a frenzy of haste, not from fear. She was past fear. Then she sat staring while she heard her heart beat in long dragging strokes as if somewhere in the distance, a muffled bell was tolling.

Under her eyes lay a small sheet; a leaf from a soldier's writing pad, scrawled over in faint pencil. The message! Her heart had told her there was a message. Before she lifted it and took it out to read, sharp as a sword thrust came the certainty: It was not from the man whom she had seen riding over the Barrow.

"I don't know if you will ever get this, Margaret. If the last of us wins through, I know he will bring it to you. My darling, I tried to get home to you, to you and Thornbarrow. But fate is too strong for me. Darling, don't grieve too much. Your John.

There was a postscript:

Be kind to John Tempest, for my sake. The best friend ever man . . .

Here it broke off, to be taken up again, in a still wilder scrawl.

'I hide this. You will know where to look.'

"John Seneschal is dead." . . . How often had not those words been dinned into her ears! She had shut them against the truth. She had insisted on taking another for her beloved!—Oh, shame; oh, sorrow; oh, remorse unutterable! . . . "John Seneschal is dead." Here was his dying farewell, written as it were with the last laborings of flagging pulse; panted forth in the cruel desert with his last breath. . . .

At first the girl's heart was gripped with such physical

pain that she could only sit and rock herself and moan; kissing the letter as if it had been the dead lips of her lover.

As realization grew and spread, bodily pain became lost and forgotten in illimitable agony of soul. She had betrayed her dead, robbed him of his due mourning; she had given all that was best, all that was precious, all that was dearest, all that was his, to another lover! Not wittingly, it was true, but in a blind doomed folly.

Oh, what a gross wretch was she, that she could have been thus mistaken! What a common nature must hers be, how uninspired, dull and trivial, that she could have held and kissed and yearned over another man, and taken him for John!

It was at this point that a new sword of conviction ran through her. That other man knew!—Last night, he had known, poor impostor, that he was an impostor! And he had tried to fly. He had rushed out, away from her, with his intolerable discovery. And she had pursued him. . . . Then he had lied! He had pressed his love upon her as never before—and lied, lied, lied!

The rest she might have forgiven; but this, never! This placed him somewhere in a remote circle of baseness into which she could only look with loathing.

Margaret Amber walked out of the room which had been John Seneschal's, a different woman, to her own feeling, at least, from her who had entered it. She had decided on her next action—though, beyond that she could not see at all. She must leave Thornbarrow, leave it at once. Fortunately for her, the illness of its master permitted her to do so without a scandal. She would take herself and her car to Vale Royal instantly, or-

dering her maid to pack and follow. Beyond that decision there lay nothing but dark chaos. Whether she would tell her father; whether she would see this man, this John Tempest, or write to him, or leave only the dead silence between them—some future moment must decide for her.

She had thrust the pocketbook into her breast and felt its pressure against her flesh with a sort of savor of agony. When she reached home she would burn that photograph; burn the face of the woman who had been false to her one love.—Oh, if she could also burn the horror out of her soul, out of her body, no flame would be too fierce!

She found Gabrielle in the hall, and quietly stated her intention:

"I am in the way here, just now. I am going back to Vale Royal. I won't dream of troubling your mother to say good-by."

Gabrielle was watching from the oriel window for any sign of John, and scarcely could spare a thought out of her fretful preoccupation.

"Well, my dear—if you feel like that—perhaps——Oh, my goodness, where can John be? Oh, Margaret, Margaret, you might meet him on the way! For goodness sake, if you do, make him hurry back!—Good-by, good-by—it's dreadful, isn't it? Oh, do, do try if you can find John!"

She noticed nothing strange about Margaret; nothing fixed and terrible in her smile; she saw no gathering of dark despair in her eyes. Only, resuming her watch, the thought crossed her butterfly mind—"What a horrid hard flush Margaret has got on her cheeks!"

The great Downs which were enclosed within the Chase of Thornbarrow stretched for miles irregularly this way and that, and were necessarily traversed by roads open to the public. One of these was the shortest way to Vale Royal, and Margaret started her car along its flinty surface at a speed scarcely less headlong than that with which she had gone on her life-and-death errand in the early morning.

She skirted the edge of the King's Barrow, without turning her head. She told herself fiercely, it was the last time that she would voluntarily pass that familiar spot. All had been desecrated for her—all! At that place, holy to her for years, because there she had parted from her John, she had fallen into another man's arms!

Majestic in its wild iteration, the familiar landscape spread; fold upon fold of tossing down; clump upon clump of twisted thorn-tree; mysterious hollow dark as with bewitchment against the wide sea of green, shot with silver where the light caught the wet grass, flaming with gold where the broom still burned, swept over by cloud shadows as by airy galleons in an enchanted flight swifter than thought. . . . How she had loved it all, and how poisoned was now this dearness! There was not a brake or a thicket that was strange to her; scarcely a single rood of flower-starred turf that had not known the print of John's feet and hers—children, boy and girl, youth and maiden. John and Thornbarrow—Margaret and Thornbarrow. . . . Fate had indeed been too strong for them! "I tried to get home to you, and Thornbarrow," her piteous boy had written. And she could not even weep for him, because of the sullen heat of shame that was eating into her soul.

"I could have borne it," she cried wildly to herself.

"The murder of our hopes, the sacrifice of his young life, I could have borne it, could I have mourned him in honor. But even grief is sullied now. What right have I left myself to mourn?"

Then a voice seemed to rise within her, keening as with the cries of the women of old. "Betrayed by his friend—betrayed by my love! Oh, my John, lying out there in the desert sand, did you know, did you see us?"

She remembered, with a fresh turn of the track, the presence that had visited her between the Barrow and the house, on the day of the false John's arrival. That had been her own John . . . and he had tried to make her understand, to warn her, and she—oh dolt! oh blind!

A rider sprang from the shadow of a copse into the road above. She was at the foot of a long incline and he at the top of it. She did not know whether he saw her as she saw him; but on her side recognition was instantaneous.

He made no sign, but came, slowly trotting towards her, keeping on the turf by the edge. She breasted the hill, the little car thudding and grinding. She had no idea what might be going to happen; she only knew that she must do what the instant itself prompted. Keeping her face stealthily fixed on the curve of sky beyond the rise, where a bright cloud hung, not till the clattering of the horse's hoofs, loud on the road itself, made her aware that he was close beside her, did she look at him.

She had a sudden vivid picture of his dark leanness against the sunshine; the golden mahogany of his horse's coat and the strong black-and-white of his head—so white—so black!

She saw that the whole being of the man, who yesterday had been her lover, was one intense question. He

gripped his horse's mane, and she knew that he was preparing to leap from the saddle, when her look arrested him. Eye into eye, they gazed upon each other; and everything that Margaret would never say, that her lips were too proud, her soul too disdainful, to utter, went in one great flame from her silence into his.

She had, quite mechanically, brought her car to a standstill, without stopping the machinery, and the feverish throbs of the engine pulsed into the air like frantic heart beats. Then she detached her gaze and turned it back to the sky line. The white cloud had gone leaving an arch of exquisite blue behind it. She made a single imperious gesture—command and dismissal:

"You are wanted at Thornbarrow!" she cried in a loud clear voice. "Go back at once. Sir Edward is dying."

Then she bent to her gear, gave a reckless twist to the accelerator, and ground up the hill, jerking the little car from side to side in her frenzy of haste to leave him behind forever.

The man sat on his horse as if stunned. He listened, till there came to his ear the downward rush of her flight on the other side of the hill, hurtling, desperate like a plunge to suicide. The noise died quickly in the distance as does the flying hum of the bumble bee.

Then John Tempest, death in his soul, put spurs to the chestnut and galloped to the house upon which death was relentlessly settling.

CHAPTER XVIII

"THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO"

LORD AMBER hoped to postpone the inevitable hour of tragedy for Margaret until it could break upon her after a fashion which would at least dignify it. The man whom she had mistaken for her young lover must not appear ignoble in her eyes; she must be able to feel that, even if she found it hard to pardon, she could not scorn. Hence he had extracted that promise of silence until Sir Edward's death should leave John Tempest free to speak openly to all.

He determined to go and fetch Margaret home from Thornbarrow that very day, but first, as he phrased it to himself, he must clear decks for action. When the time came it would be a tremendous fight for his little girl and it was "up to him" to stand by her and see her through it.

His first proceeding was to eliminate Lady Amber. Her presence would intolerably interfere with the task he had set himself. He trusted to find a plausible enough pretext to induce Margaret to go away with him, for a while; if no better excuse served, it would have to be London, the trousseau and their last days together. But Carmela, emotional, inquisitive, chattering, futile-minded, must be removed from the neighborhood of Thornbarrow, immediately, at all cost. He would make her discover that it was absolutely imperative that she should motor up to town without a moment's delay.

Perhaps he never encompassed a finer achievement than the getting of the plethoric, unwieldy woman out of the house within the space of a couple of hours. To turn her mind to the journey was easy enough—he had not been thirty years wedded to a creature who was hardly as much childish as harmlessly animal—without having learned how to drive and coax her. But to get her body to follow suit was no such easy matter. After half an hour at the telephone, canceling for himself, ordering for her, he proceeded to her apartment. There, with infinite patience, but relentless determination, he set about to detach her from her pillows and cushions; from her chocolate pot and her *brioches*, and hustle her (with the intelligent assistance of the French maid) through all the languors and halts of her toilet, while English underlings saw to the packing.

He knew the right moment to produce the tiny, pungent cigarette she affected, for her to whiff at twice and cast away. He knew how to feign discouragement of the plan altogether, when her interest in it sank to lethargy; on the other hand, when to urge the inconvenience of reaching town too late, with the possible catastrophe of a postponed tea. He dangled before her imagination the choice cakes he had ordered the London housekeeper to provide in readiness for her arrival.

In the middle of his self-imposed task, his ear on the alert caught the faint quick hum, like the song of an angry bee, peculiar to Margaret's car. He rose, and strolled with apparent carelessness to look out of the window. Aye—there it was, skimming up the approach. The child was driving it like a fury! A sudden conviction fell upon his spirit. If he had not had a singular gift of prescience. he would not have been the successful

man he was. Where his daughter was concerned, this faculty gathered uncanny acuteness. That flying car was carrying misfortune. He knew it.

The sound of Lady Amber's guttural voice rose angrily behind him: "Goodness of God, Isabelle, a hair pulls in that curl! Ah, *satanée fille*, you have sworn to destroy my nervous system!"

The little car swerved down the side road leading to the stables, instead of making for the house. That confirmed his presentiment. Margaret wanted to meet no one—she would go straight to her room the back way. He turned to his wife, jingling the keys in his pocket:

"I was thinking, my dear, that a glass of the old Malaga and a biscuit would not be out of place for you before starting?"

"Ah, my God, Amber—yes, perhaps! It is a terrible journey. Ah, what it is to be a mother! But to spend another night like this last one—knowing that those dressmakers of misfortune will have no clothes ready for my poor child—it would kill me, with my 'eart.—Malaga, you think?"

"I will see to it myself," said he, and went, still playing with his keys, the most unconcerned figure imaginable, out of the room.

Cautiously reconnoitering through the heavy window curtains of the picture gallery, then from behind the padded swing door that divided the two wings of the house, Lord Amber satisfied himself of the truth of his premonitions.

He saw Margaret jump out of her car, leave it standing in the middle of the yard, and fly into the house without looking to the right or left. An instant later he saw her appear at the top of the back-stairs. She crossed

her father's anxious vision without any suspicion of his presence, and dashed down the corridor into her own room. He heard the bolt shot. He had had only one glimpse of her face. It was enough.

His own face was gray, as he slowly turned away and went downstairs to give orders for Lady Amber's Malaga. But, however much his heart was wrung for this present suffering, he knew that the despairs of youth are not eternal; his eyes could look beyond to the glimmer of hope on the horizon.

The huge yellow limousine came, purring softly, to the armoried porch and fell into stillness, gently quivering on its springs. It was already loaded with her ladyship's coroneted trunks, the hampers of hot-house flowers, fruit and vegetables. Under the chauffeur's legs, her ladyship's luncheon-basket, stuffed with exquisite supplements to the probably bad luncheon at Salisbury, was carefully stowed away. Lady Amber's own footman with the sable rug over his arm, and Lady Amber's French maid, clutching the small bag that held a fortune in jewels, stood waiting till it should be her ladyship's pleasure to install herself.

With pauses, a dozen irrelevant happy thoughts and divagations, Lady Amber came at last, rolling majestically downstairs, on her husband's arm. She was distinctly fortified by six sponge-fingers dipped in old Malaga. She was distinctly stimulated and amused by the prospect of nuptial shopping, and her own immense responsibility in connection therewith. In that shining purple morocco, coroneted bag, which Isabelle gripped (as well, indeed, she might), Lord Amber had placed a cheque for a thousand pounds. Carmela was to spend it at Gar-

rard's, as a mere *hors d'œuvre*, for any trifle she fancied for herself and Margaret.

Her cherubic face, made up rather white for the journey (according to Isabelle's artistic taste) was wreathed in smiles as she nodded farewell. The great car rolled away with no effort than a sigh.

Lord Amber stood a moment, gazing after it, with a sense of immense relief. "She would have driven the poor child mad!" he thought. Then he turned and pensively went up to Margaret's room.

He knocked two or three times, gently, before he heard lagging steps within. She flung open the door and stood before him, dry-eyed. The flush that Gabrielle Seneschal disapproved of ran like burning bars on either cheek. She was perfectly self-possessed; but the father was swift to see that his company was the last thing she desired.

"I thought it was your day for London," she exclaimed abruptly.

He dropped his glance from her face. This hard-headed man of business had a woman's intuition where his daughter was concerned. He felt that even his eyes of anxious affection were an intrusion.

"Your mother thought she would like to run up to Grosvenor Square, for a few days. I remained to see her off."

The relief that he himself had acknowledged a moment ago was faintly perceptible through the mask of her misery.

"She had not, of course, the least idea that you were coming home to-day," he proceeded.

His back was towards her. He was absently staring out of the window. It overlooked the enclosed garden

upon which his own sanctum gave—that room in which, with the tongue of a Satan, he had tempted John Tempest in his hour of trial.

"Oh, I forgot!" exclaimed Margaret. Her voice was harsh, her movements were jerky and irritable; nevertheless, she was holding herself with unbending courage. He was proud of her. "Sir Edward's very ill.—Dying."

"Indeed?"

Lord Amber wheeled around. This was news. Events were following each other like thunder claps.

"I thought I was best out of the way," she added.

It was now Margaret's turn to avoid looking at her father. He understood. She meant to hold silence. What she had found out, and how the discovery had come upon her, he was not to be told. Not now certainly, perhaps never.

He had a moment's grave concern lest John should have broken his solemn pledge. He would have given much to ascertain the point; for upon John's complete integrity hinged his every hope for her future, but he would not press her by a single question. For her sake he must be strong enough to wait; and the second movement of his mind tended to reassure him. He remembered the defiant truthfulness of the young man's eyes: "No, no," he said to himself, "the lad's honest, he will not have failed a second time!"

He stood contemplating her averted face, her locked lips set like marble. And while with his brain he approved; while he was glad that she was strong enough to keep her secret; while he felt it made much more possible his hopes, since a spoken word of condemnation may be beyond recall, his fatherly heart was sore that its love should be thus shut out.

After a pause he said—and he thought his voice was natural—

"Poor Sir Edward! But his existence was no life."

"No."

"His death," said Lord Amber slowly, "may bring many changes."

"Yes."

The father gave a sigh. He laid his hand on Margaret's. Both were very cold.

"How is it to be, my little girl? This—this news from Thornbarrow must upset our plans. Should you be lonely, if I were to go up to London, after *la mama*, this evening?" He stopped with a wistful smile, "I must leave one or the other of you alone."

Margaret withdrew from his touch with an almost angry movement. She stood, her shoulder towards him; and again he had a vision of that rigid profile, the line of the young jaw sharp with the clenching of the teeth. He understood that she was so completely lost in her own black thoughts that she could give no kind of attention to what he was saying. He waited a moment more and then said, "Shall I go to London, Peg?"

She started and her lip trembled.

"No, no, Father," she exclaimed hurriedly, "don't leave me!"

He began to walk away out of the room; he saw that she had reached her limit of self-control and he loved her too much not to help her in her gallant silence—that silence which was so much the best for her and for all! As he went, he said:

"I've got a good deal of work to do. I shall not appear at lunch. If you want me, Peg, you know where

to find me," and closed the door very gently behind him.

As with some external sense, extraordinarily remote from her present circle of intensely concentrated emotional life, Margaret realized her father's goodness. The best of it all had been that he had not forced her confidence. She knew now that this was the only thing for her; to keep silence.

If every creature of the world were ready to cry out John Tempest's secret, she must still be the one to hold her tongue.

She sat on the couch at the foot of her bed, where she had dropped the moment she found herself alone once more, her chin on her hand, thinking, thinking. The resolution which had been formed, independently, it seemed of her volition—settled into the irrevocability of a vow. All that was infinitely precious to her; all that had practically formed the foundation of her life, that had been at the back of every thought, the pulse of every joy, woven into the weft and warp of her character—her love for John Seneschal—had been perverted, blotted, poisoned! What was there for such a hurt, but to cover it up, to hide it away?

To let any eye look at it, even the compassionate eye of a father, was what her nature shrank from in its most intimate fiber. Rather indeed, she thought fiercely, any eye but his! To be pitied, to be sorrowed over, to be sympathized with! No—no, every veil that silence could draw, between her soul and others, she would draw it. No depth, no height of barrier, would be too great for her to build between the world and this desecrated grave of hope and love. She would be silent, and she would be alone!

The return of her maid from Thornbarrow startled her out of her solitary brooding. The girl brought a bad report of Sir Edward: He had recognized Captain Seneschal, but the doctor had not any hope. She looked curiously at her young mistress as she spoke; but Margaret's face, with the sullen flush on it, was impenetrable. There had been gossip already at Thornbarrow over her young lady's sudden departure without even waiting for Captain Seneschal's return from his ride. The maid was further confirmed in her suspicion that there was more in it than met the eye when she found that the tea she was ordered to bring up was the only meal that Miss Amber had tasted since her return.

Margaret ate and drank then; though it might have been so much gall and sand to her palate, because she realized that to take up ordinary life was now her best armor. She sent a message to her father that she would come down to dinner and that she hoped he might not be too busy to join her.

He appeared in his meticulous evening dress and offered her his arm. His courtesy, unobtrusive yet watchful, was of the kind that very usually escapes the notice of the casual observer; but Margaret felt it all about her, that evening, padding, as it were, the stony way she had to traverse. Now and again, indeed, he seemed to be quietly lifting her over an impassable bit; to be pushing a branch aside here, picking a thorn out of her skirt there; and withal so tenderly deferential to her agonized reticences; so intelligent in avoiding even the appearance of tact or of soothing, or of being afraid to touch any sensitive spot.

Yet Margaret did not feel herself "managed." He was exquisitely everyday. On his side he was glad to

see her eat her lamb cutlet and peas, and drink her glass of Clos-Vougeot though, when she did not refuse the hot-house peach, for which, from childhood upwards, she had been frankly greedy, he could have broken into tears over her. Her unnatural courage stabbed him.

After dinner she tried to smoke the usual cigarette with him; but it was a failure. The thing kept going out between her lips. At last she got up with an abrupt movement, kissed him on the forehead and declared, stretching herself and yawning, that she would go to bed. Both yawn and stretch were artificial, as the restless fire in her eyes made manifest.

He went with her as far as the foot of the stairs, and stood watching till the bend of the corridor hid her. Then he retired into his study. She would not sleep, he knew; neither could he. He would work.

It is woman's way to seek intensification of sorrow; and Margaret, brave as she was, was no exception. She brought all her strength to it. Not a drop in that bitter cup would she spare herself. There was a kind of expiation in that, an acrid satisfaction.

How long she sat, holding the battered letter-case in her hands, pressing it to her lips, her eyes, her forehead, her breast; inhaling the love-breath and the death-breath that hung about it; how often she re-read that sad simple scrawl; how she pored over her own letters, striving to catch through those long past comments and records, some hint of what John had thought and felt as he perused them—she never knew!

After a while, she got out the dispatch box in which she kept his letters to her. He had not been a very good correspondent; and, considering the long years they were

apart, there were not so many of them. One by one, beginning at the first, she went steadily through them. And each time she laid the folded sheet back in its place, she felt as if she could hear a shovelful of sand fall upon the uncoffined body of her dead. John Tempest had buried him—he had told her that often enough! and she, denying, had clung to his hands, warming them, kissing them, believing them the hands of her lover . . . the hands that had buried her John!

She marshaled all the events of her life, till she came to those days when the great deception had begun. Letters from Lady Seneschal, from Gabrielle, from Dr. Caldwell, two telegrams from John Tempest himself during their short separation! . . . And here was the bit of thyme she had plucked on the Barrow, that evening when she had been so madly happy in his arms.

She took the withered sprig between her fingers; then some curious irresistible impulse made her lift it to her nostrils. The whole moment rushed back upon her. She felt the strong arms strain her; heard his heart-beats in her ear—the heart that leaped for love of her—felt his kisses on her lips, the moment when she and her lover had thrilled with the same ecstasy! And now it caught her again; only, this time, it was doubled with an anguish which seemed to pierce to the very seat of life. "Oh, my God; oh, John!"

She did not know which John she was calling on.

Scarcely aware of what she did, she cast herself upon the floor,—no place could be low enough for her depth of self-abasement!—and beat her forehead against the hand that held the thyme; shudders ran through her as the pungent fragrance again assailed her senses. Surely no woman's soul was ever rent between such extremes of

passion! To be betrayed by her own self, she who had been so hideously betrayed by fate and man! She was false, in the very essence of her being, to her love; and the knowledge that she had unwittingly failed that love was worse than death to her. Was she then so vile a creature, that, clasping in spirit the dead John Seneschal, only just dead to her, the living John, the usurper, should yet hold sway upon her?

Betrayed by a kiss! Betrayed by a kiss—! The words swung in her brain. The dead John, the living John, and herself, they had all been betrayed—by a kiss!

The phrase linked on to another. Margaret Amber, who was as little of a Christian as any girl of the age, recalled the story of the greatest of all betrayals. "*Do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*"

She sat up and pushed the hair from her burning forehead. In the sense of illimitable human weakness which overwhelmed her; in the agony of humiliation, revolt, and passion which possessed her, there came a craving in her soul to fling itself at the feet of the Christ, crushed, betrayed, agonizing and yet triumphant!

She remembered the Spanish Crucifix! On the impulse, she sprang to her feet. Mechanically turning up the lights, she went through the long passages, through her mother's suite of apartments to the dressing-room where it hung.

Lady Amber, lapsed Catholic, had too sensitive a consideration for her comfort to place that symbol where it would reproach her eyes at every turn. Nevertheless, she had a superstition that some misfortune might happen to her were she not to give the Crucifix some place in her house. She had had it fixed, therefore, between

two huge cedar wardrobes over a little table upon which were placed those prayer books which she had not opened since the week of Margaret's birth—when she had feared she was on the way to judgment.

The dressing-room, so-called, was hardly ever entered except by the maids: Lady Amber declared the light was bad. Perhaps the mute rebuke of that Crucifix—heirloom so cherished by the piety of her ancestors!—had much to say to this avoidance.

Margaret dragged up a chair, unhooked the weighty relic and carried it away. As she passed through the bedroom again, its whole atmosphere, its display of boundless luxury nauseated her. The heavy scent of heliotrope mingled with the pungency of lingering pastille and cigarette smoke; the cynical opulence of every detail—silver, ivory, gold, enamel, mother-of-pearl, where ordinary people would have used paint or brass; the row of French novels by the bed which itself billowed with embroidered lawn and priceless lace; the chocolate box, the liqueur stand.—What an existence, in a world paved with agonies!

When she got back into her own room, she cast herself on her knees by the sofa; and, clasping the great cross, gazed at the figure with eyes from which, as yet, no single tear had come to wash away the first horror of discovery.

She had always felt there was some vast meaning hidden in the Crucifix; a meaning to which the world had once had the clew, but from which humanity had drifted away. She was one of those who went on easy roads in the great procession marching with its back to Calvary. But now something that sprang from the very abyss of her sorrow made her halt. The pale suffering head was

bent forward; the tints of the old ivory, the duskiness which had accumulated in its delicate carving, gave it an extraordinary depth of expression. She remembered how she had looked on John Tempest's scarred temples, on his countenance bleached and hewn with suffering, and had found there a likeness to this presentiment of the enduring Christ.

Like drift on the torrent of her contending thoughts, came another shred of memory: *"Forgive them, for they know not what they do."*—Words that she had once heard with a callous ear and an unreceiving heart; how poignant their meaning was to her now! *"They know not what they do!"*

Her whole self, her past, her future; life and its intentions, every outlook as it presented itself to her, had become one excruciating, hard-knotted problem. The earth beneath her feet, the heaven above her head, alike had failed her. She was as one hanging in the void, agonizing in the dark.

She pressed her brow against the silver nail that pierced the ivory feet. When He hung in desolation that was what He had said: *"Forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

In the chaos of anguish here was reason at last. Here was a key which might yet unlock the torturing riddle for her. Not one of them had known what they did! As some one lost in a black night of storm sees, far, far away in the distance, a gleam of light which may mean shelter, salvation, Margaret saw, at an immense distance in the gloom of her own desolate future, the faint dawn of the hour in which her heart would find the peace of forgiveness for John Tempest and for herself.

She was broken with fatigue. Though she was sure she could not sleep, she must lie down.

When she was undressed a thought struck her. She propped the Crucifix against the wall on her writing table opposite her bed, where she could keep her eyes on it. It could not be very far from sunrise, and she would like to lie and look at the cross, and watch light dawn upon it. She put out the lamp, went to the window, drew aside the curtains and pulled up the blinds. It was a moonless hour; but between the clouds there were star-pierced spaces full of serenity. She glanced upwards first and then absently downwards; a steady beam ran, spear-shaped, across the flags and sward of the enclosed garden.

He kept his vigil, down there; his faithful heart watched; his tenderness burned with a quiet ray, unfailing.—Her father! A sob rose in her throat and the merciful tears came at last.

CHAPTER XIX

DECEIVED TO THE END

JOHN, met in the hall by Lady Seneschal and Gabrielle, was only vaguely conscious of their clatter of reproach. Like one stunned he let himself be brought up to Sir Edward's room, every sense in him still reeling from the blow of Margaret's repudiation. He could not yet begin to ask himself how she knew, nor how much. No one else at Thornbarrow knew—that was certain.

"Your father's been asking for you!—Your father might have died while you were amusing yourself!"—"It's been too cruel of you, John! Father was fretting and fretting!"—"It might have killed him! Weatherby says, Weatherby says!"

So it went on while, curiously enough, the one clearly conscious emotion in John's mind was grief and anxiety for the dying man.

For many weeks he had played his imposed part of son, in willful deception. Then there had come the time when he had almost deceived himself into the belief that he might indeed be that son, and always there had been lavished upon him a wealth of fatherly love, unselfish, anxious, patient—infinitely pathetic. He had known himself to be the single thought of the brain that worked, through the long sleepless nights, the interminable days, entirely for his future interests. He had been the one passionate preoccupation of a soul trembling on the brink of Eternity. A heart stricken with overwhelming sor-

rows had twined itself around the son miraculously restored, as it seemed, to its tenderness. All the accumulated ambitions of the race, all the hopes of the House —last of the Seneschals!—John had been this. And he had been more. The sick man, broken in body and spirit, had begun of late to turn to him from the uncongenial company of wife and daughter with a craving of ever-growing intensity. With that lying appeasement of John's conscience, their very silences, as they sat together, agreed. The moment the supposed son had let himself frankly fall in with the father's plans and fancies as if he had indeed been the heir, Sir Edward's satisfaction in him had been unbounded. And Thornbarrow, loved by both (if from such widely different standpoints) linked them with a bond which the Squire, all disillusioned of life, worn out and naturally cynical as he was, seemed to think not even death could break. He spoke, and—it was clear to John—felt, as if he must know from the other side of the grave what his successor would make of the cherished inheritance. It was with an ardent content that he found, on almost every occasion, their ideas to coincide, their desires to meet.

John knew that his step was listened for; that, nailed, first to his armchair, then to his bed, this waning man longed, with a woman's fondness, for the first sight of his face in the morning; that his entrance brought the only ray of joy and comfort into a room dimmed with suffering; that every time he left it, it was so much life withdrawn. Also he knew that, with his own returning health, a pride had grown in the father's heart for him whom he believed to be flesh of his flesh; a pride commensurate only to the love he had given. Sir Edward would have himself propped in bed to watch him ride

across the park; his eye would kindle as he ran it up and down the vigorous figure.

It was not strange, therefore, that now John, hurrying to the sick chamber, should have felt as if it were indeed a father he was about to lose. He might have believed Sir Edward already dead, so altered was the countenance that met his sight, so gray against the white of the pillow, but that he had seen enough of death to know that its aspect is far less terrible than that of the shadow it casts before.

The moment John Tempest's foot crossed the threshold the heavy lids that drooped over the unseeing eyes of the dying man began to quiver. The lips moved:

"John!"——

Then a hand, well-nigh pulseless, groped. John vaguely knew that a chair was being thrust forward for him. He sat down, mechanically, and took the cold hand.

"John," murmured Sir Edward again. The eyes opened a little more, looked and satisfied themselves; a faint smile relaxed the rigidity of the lips.

And so John sat, hour after hour, and held back the departing soul by the mere strength of that imaginary link. From time to time, Sir Edward would open his eyes and strain across the mists of dissolution to catch another vision of the beloved face. And each time he would murmur "John!" He had lapses of unconsciousness from which it was more and more difficult to rouse him. The intervals became longer. At last some one, it was Dr. Weatherby said in John's ear:

"He is gone."

John looked up fiercely. He knew better. Sir Edward's eyes opened slowly, they turned from one face to another of those about his bed, and finally rested on John.

There was the most extraordinary intensity and perception in the gaze; the soul had concentrated all its strength to look forth for the last time from its earthly windows; then, with a sigh of content, the spirit of the cheated father slipped away.

The dead hand clung to John, as if it could not relinquish its dearest possession. It was a dreadful pain to him to have to use force to disengage himself.—It was the only touch of real love he might ever know!

Deceived to the end! Looking down on the waxen face upon which peace was deepening into majesty, John felt assured that it was so. Sir Edward had had no revelation at the moment of passing; he had drawn his last breath in absolute certainty—even in comfort. His eyes had become extinguished in the very act of conveying a final message of love.

John Tempest, as he wrenched himself from the dead man's clasp, thought that, had it been otherwise, had he brought in the end even a doubt to that trusting soul, there would have been nothing left to him after all than that solution by pistol which Lord Amber had so scornfully condemned. There is a point where human endurance ends.

When Dr. Weatherby led him at last out of the chamber full of the awe and hush of death, they found Lady Seneschal in hysterics in the gallery—where the new-made widow seemed to have collapsed into the first chair which met her tottering steps.

Gabrielle, in excited attendance, hailed the doctor in tones that emulated her mother's uncontrolled screams. She was hopping round like a small distracted bird; and was of about as much use.

"Weatherby, come to mother!—Weatherby, come to mother!"

As the doctor stopped, John went heavily on, up to his own room. He could not bring himself to speak just then. He must have an undisturbed hour to commune with himself; to decide on the right course of action. One decision had been made for him by the shrill cries now pursuing him. If mere grief could evoke such desecrating clamor, how terrible would be the effect, if he were to follow his own desire and have done with deception here and now? He must wait till after the funeral. Yes, he saw that quite clearly; he must bear the burden till then, play on his part; act the son of the house, the man who has come into his inheritance, out of sheer respect for the dead. There must be no wrangling over Sir Edward's corpse, no explosion of scandal before that honored remnant was laid to rest. The last of the Seneschals must have the final honors paid to him with the reverence and respect which were his due; and not become a nine days' wonder, the pity and the talk of the county, before he lay at peace with his ancestors.

But the quiet moment John sought was not to be granted. The moment he closed the door of his room, he noticed the open drawer of the writing-table; remembered and looked for the pocketbook on the window seat. When he saw that it was gone, there came a flash of understanding into his tired mind, vivid and searing as lightning.

Margaret! She had been in his room! She had found it! She had found it, and there had been something in it which had taught her the truth. Something which he had never known it contained. He stood, clasping his head; thinking frantically. . . . Yes, that must be it, that was it! And that was why she had repudiated him

with a look; with a silence had cast him from her. She and the Buffer, both—the living and the dead!

Then he remembered how he had tried to give her back her lover's pocketbook, telling her that he had no right to keep it; that it was the dead John Seneschal's. How she had thrust it back upon him, pleading even with tears, that he should keep it for her sake. She might have remembered that, too!

What was to be done now? How would Margaret act? All depended upon that. Would she go to her father, and would he meet her revelation with the Machiavellian plan he had elaborated? Oh, if he did that—John knew Margaret—she would proclaim herself free of the imposture as with a herald's trumpet blast so that the very echoes would quiver.

Even as he stood, irresolute, almost ready to rush forth again and shout the truth himself, a footman entered, bearing a letter.

"From Vale Royal, sir."

John tore it open. It contained only one line:

Your secret is safe with me.——M. A.

He crushed the sheet in his hand. "There is no answer," he said to the servant who lingered.

This was a youth as yet insufficiently trained; he thought it becoming to reply:

"Thank you, Sir John."

John Tempest felt as if he had been struck on both cheeks. The wording of Margaret's message was an insult; and, coming upon it so quickly, the title on the sycophant's tongue stung him like a jeer of the devil. It was but part of the many humiliations now likely to crowd upon him; he must bear with them and carry on,

as best he might, till the whole false situation would be cleared up. But Margaret—Margaret's words: "Your secret is safe" . . . Secret! And safe! What then did she think of him? In what category of vulgar impostors did she class him? Was it not enough to have made him feel, with a scorn that disdained even a word of reproach, that she had done with him? Must one moment of human weakness be punished by such affront as this to his manhood, to his common honesty? In effect was she not saying to him: "You may persist in your fraud, for aught I care!" She would not care were he to damn himself, so utterly had she flung him out of her life.

There is no better crutch for the halting gait of sorrow than anger. John was stimulated by the sense of the injustice done him out of a weak, unavailing remorse into the consciousness that, save for his lapse, he had acted as honorably as a man could in such extraordinary circumstances. Honorably now he would go through with it upon the lines he had planned.

CHAPTER XX

THE NEW SIR JOHN

UPON my word," said Dr. Weatherby, looking at his whilom patient proudly and rubbing his hands, "I think we've made an uncommon good job of you!"

It was two days after Sir Edward's death; and John, who had quietly but determinedly taken up the reins of authority at Thornbarrow, had just finished discussing the details of the forthcoming funeral with a select committee assembled in the library for the purpose. These gentry—clergyman, lawyer, agent, head-bailiff and some representative tenants—were just now pouring out through the great hall, treading softly, speaking in undertones, bearing themselves in fine with the muffled melancholy proper to a house of mourning.

The doctor lingered. He now remained at Thornbarrow nearly all day, pretexting the necessity of keeping an eye on Lady Seneschal. He was in reality bursting with curiosity and importance; savoring, too, every fresh proof of his own treatment in a case which had baffled London acumen. Had he not said it to that fine Harley Street fellow? He knew how to deal with your hysterico-nervo-war symptoms. He had dealt with them, and behold the result! Would any one recognize the doddering, white-faced, semi-lunatic, with his parrot cry, "John Seneschal is dead!" in this clear-headed, quick, self-controlled young man who was taking up the responsibility of his position with such dignity and capacity; grappling with its diffi-

culties; ordering, regulating, foreseeing, in a manner which would have been admirable in one of twice his years and experience?

"The best Seneschal of the lot!" Dr. Weatherby had made that remark in several quarters already. He now repeated it to the personage most concerned, and added:

"I always knew, once we got your will-power back in its proper place, we would make a fine cure of you. But, upon my word, I hardly thought it would come so quick!"

John looked up from the notes he was jotting down, and smiled. Detecting a hint of irony in his expression, Dr. Weatherby hastened to explain that, though he flattered himself he had the physician's eye, the first practitioner in the world found himself on ticklish ground when it came to mental cases.

"And I tell you, my young friend, that that grand London consultant of yours who brought you down here—I could see he was washing his hands of you—gave you up as a bad job, he did, upon my word! Pshaw! I'd give ten pounds this moment myself to have him here, in this room, and show him what a country doctor can do with the help of judgment and commonsense, and—ah—some little gift of diagnosis!"

"If you'll excuse me," said John rising, "I will bring this list to Lady Seneschal; she might like to see it before passing it on to the secretary."

Dr. Weatherby, slowly rubbing his hands, glanced at the closely-written sheet of foolscap.

"List of guests for the funeral, is it?"

John was moving towards the door. He paused courteously to answer:

"I have decided to conduct the whole business on the lines of the old family traditions. I think it is what

Sir Edward would have wished. No one is to be left out."

Dr. Weatherby suddenly slapped his leg, and jumped up with an exclamation:

"Why the dickens shouldn't I? It's worth trying, anyhow.—I beg your pardon, I am talking to myself. What I am saying is, why shouldn't I write to that Caldwell fellow to come to the father's funeral—and have a look at the son?"

"A look at me!" John Tempest faintly changed color; then he said, quickly and decidedly: "Yes, let him come, by all means, if he cares to. Yes, I should like him to be here. Perhaps you will write and suggest it. Tell him of the special train."

"Grand idea!" said Dr. Weatherby, rubbing more vigorously than ever. "Didn't he ask me to keep him posted? 'Come and see,' I'll say, 'your hopeless case. Come and see the finest young man in the county—the new Sir John Seneschal.'"

John smiled bitterly.

"Yes, tell him that," he said, and left the room.

In the gallery outside the door of Lady Seneschal's own sitting-room, he stood still a moment to gather his energies together for the unutterable weariness and vexation of spirit which he knew awaited him. Of all those trials which his peculiar position brought upon him, none was more jarring to his nerves, more difficult to steer through, than his necessary interviews with the two unreasonable beings to whom in their affliction he had to act the rôle of son and brother.

Lady Seneschal's grief, which, if genuine, was largely based on selfish considerations, displayed itself in a general irritation, a futile quarrel with fate. Her self-pity was only equaled by her sense of outrage that she

should have been thus picked out by Providence for disaster.

Gabrielle's chirpy attempts at consolation, Dr. Weatherby's rough philosophy, the Reverend Mr. Dominick's mellifluous eloquence, all elicited the same iteration of grievance, sometimes accompanied by convulsive sobs, sometimes poured forth with a sort of fury that dried her widow's tears and sent flame to her cheek:

"It's all very well for you to talk! (Hold your tongue, Gabie!) I say it's too much, too much for any woman. A husband and two sons, in two years! It's—it's positively a curse! I say, a curse, a curse. I say it's worse than the Black Death and the Decameron. Oh, yes, I know I have a son left, Weatherby. I don't want you to tell me that. I can find it out for myself, thank you—though," here the sobbing would seize her, "I might as well have no son—hold your tongue, Gabie!—for all the affection he shows me! Ask the child, ask the maids, any of the servants. You can see for yourself. Has he shown me the smallest tenderness? Has he given me one word, one kiss, one kiss, since his father died? No, he hasn't; you know he hasn't. He doesn't care that—not that, not a snap of his fingers—for me or his sister!"

"And, begging your pardon," Dr. Weatherby would roundly respond, "the young man is behaving perfectly. He has not had a thought but for your comfort—to save you trouble, to spare you in every way. Gad, there's many a young fellow, coming into his property, would be thinking of himself first. Kisses? Pshaw! He's not the kissing sort; you ought to be thanking God for it!"

The widow was more amenable to the uncompromising virility of her doctor than to her parson's insinuating urbanity.

"It's all very well, Mr. Dominick; you've got to trot out that sort of thing. I say you have. It's your *métier*, your *métier*, your *métier*. But it is not the least comfort to me. What do you mean by resigned? Resigned and the will of God, and all that? What I say is that, if it's the will of God I should be left a widow before my time—and Gabie not out yet—and lose two sons the same day, two fine boys, two splendid boys—you know what splendid boys they were—with no one to stand by me but a mad mother-in-law—I don't know what you call her, if not mad. I say, hatter, hatter! hatter! If that's what I've got to be grateful for, I say it's enough to turn any one Buddha!—Oh, I might as well be a Buddha!—Oh, now you're beginning to talk about John. I say John's the worst of my trials. I say that boy's cruel. No son to me. He's so odd, so altered—not that he wasn't always queer. He was always a queer, sullen, self-centered little boy! And I'm sure, how I have nursed him and looked after him since he came back! Spared nothing, spared nothing. The money it cost! The champagne, the beef tea, the sweetbreads! And no gratitude, no feeling for me. But, there, I've always said it, there are people—it's like servants—you might take off your clothes, and they'd never say 'thank you'!—John?—Mark my words, Gabie, we'll get no good out of John! The moment I laid eyes on him in the hospital, I saw that. He's got a hard, sardonic nature, a sardonine saturnic nature."

Now, however, the alleged owner of this peculiar temperament, pausing outside the door, was relieved to note that the accents which flowed uninterruptedly in Lady Seneschal's boudoir were not, for the moment, characterized by any intensity of feeling. They sounded, on

the contrary, interested, almost amused. He took courage, knocked and entered.

Lady Seneschal, Gabrielle, their maid and a modish yet discreet-looking person in black, were all poring together over the contents of two large dressmakers' cases and several hat boxes. On Lady Seneschal's head had been placed a black toque, delicately peaked, outlined in white, like a Mary Stuart coif, from which floods of the finest crêpe fell nearly to the hem of her dress.

The new mourning! The whole room was strewn with it.

Lady Seneschal contemplated her own reflection a moment longer in the great wall mirror, and then turned upon the intruder. There was the hint of a simper on her lips; a self-conscious question in those small blue eyes, shining unconquerably bright in spite of the tears they had shed. In one hand she clutched a filmy handkerchief so deeply bordered as to show almost more black than white.

John had fallen back a step. The thoughts springing in his mind were written but too clearly in his face. He was very young still; and life, which had brought him through such stupendous adventures to so strange a pass, had taught him little or nothing of society and of its ways. He suddenly realized that frivolity had depths of its own; that nullity could engulf like the void.

Gabrielle and the saleswoman from Madame Frédégonde's superlative establishment rushed into the breach. Their glances of reproach made him conscious of the ungraciousness of his stupefied silence.

"I think mother looks sweet!—you look sweet in that, mother! It is quite the most becoming."

"Milady is very much to her advantage," said the woman; then proceeded to expound in a rapid French of

which John was only able to understand a few snatches here and there, how Madame Frédégonde had picked out for Milady the very last, last Paris cry. "Ah, if it is for Lady Seneschal," Madame had said, "all that is most fine and most distinguished! My lady is of those who will be of the last elegance as a widow! No one so well understands how to set out the chaste coquetry of tears as Madame Frédégonde!"

"I came for business," said John. "Perhaps you will send for me when you are disengaged."

But Lady Seneschal had caught sight of the list in his hands. Instantly, greed of power chased greed of vanity from her mind.

"Don't go, John—I see what you've got. Gabie, take her into my bedroom and come back instantly. We must discuss this. You will excuse me, Mademoiselle. Important business. *Les affaires, les affaires!*"

When Gabrielle returned she found her mother in possession of the list; waving it in fierce indignation and stamping her foot. She had not thought of removing the widow's coif; the diaphanous folds of the black veil were agitated as by an angry wind.

"I say I will not have Teddy Seneschal-Smith in this house again! I say I will not have him asked to your father's funeral. He's no claim on us. He's no right to be here. You're taking a great deal too much on yourself, John. If I don't want to have him, it's enough for you. He's a rotter, a fool, a bounder—a rotter! I won't have him. I will not be bullied. It's an insult to me, and to your father's memory. I say I won't have him."

"I am very sorry to oppose you," said John with white lips, "but he must be asked."

At this, Lady Seneschal's scream of rage must have

echoed even to the room where the dead man lay, deaf at last, in peace at last, in his coffin. Gabrielle joined her pipe to the squall:

"Oh, come, John, you can't oppose mother! You can't want to be cruel to mother. Oh, come, John, you can't have such a hard heart!"

John's voice, all the more authoritative that it rang low and cold against this noise and heat, repeated his previous phrase:

"I am sorry, but he must be asked."

He took the list back into his possession as he spoke. There was something relentless in his aspect which brought the two excited women to unwilling recognition of the power now in his hands. Gabrielle burst into quick, dry gasps, like an angry canary. Lady Seneschal turned in viperish malice.

"And where is Margaret? Where's your keeper, Margaret?—Where's your keeper?—John, I say, Margaret is wanted here to teach you to behave!"

The young man stared at her without a word of reply, struck as with the force of a blow. Perceiving the effect she had produced, Lady Seneschal followed it up with a fresh outburst, in which some alarm was mixed with malice:

"Now that I come to think of it, what's the meaning of her not being here? Don't tell me that you've quarreled! Don't tell me," she repeated, "that you've been fool enough to quarrel with Margaret!"

She stopped, poised on the verge of an hysterical fit, waiting for the worst. John Tempest turned away and began to move to the door in silence. But Gabrielle rushed after him and caught him by the arm.

"You must answer mother, John. You can't be a brute

and make her anxious like this, and always go away and never say a word!"

He shook himself free.

"I have not quarreled with Margaret," he said loudly, as he went out of the room.

There was nothing for him but to carry on his task according to his own lights without any further attempts to secure the widow's coöperation. Such scenes as these were worse than futile. They might lead to the very event he now most dreaded: The desecration of the house of the dead by a premature disclosure.

But two days more and he would be free!

Slowly he walked down the gallery, conning the list as he went, when the door he had just closed was noisily reopened and Gabrielle's quick step pattered after him.

"John, John, mother says it's just struck her; have you ordered your own mourning?"

He threw a convicted look on his gray tweed. He had not thought of it. Lady Seneschal herself now appeared on the threshold; the *contretemps* seemed fraught in her mind with all the importance of a fresh calamity.

"You silly boy, it's too bad! I've got to think of everything. You must wire, you must 'phone. Such disrespect! You must telephone from the post-office. Your father's tailors. Tell them they must let you have them tomorrow."

"They have not got my measures," said John, "and anyhow it's too late." He paused, then said quickly: "I'll wear khaki—I have a new suit. I had it made when I was in the hospital—when I got these things."

Gabrielle lifted up her voice protesting.

"It's not really done, John. Every one is out of uniform now—the moment they can."

"I've not been discharged yet—I am only on sick leave."

Her eyes upbraided him. He was deliberately missing her point: "I tell you it's not done——"

The night preceding the funeral John Tempest, worn out in body by the prolonged activities and pre-occupation of the last days; with a mind calmed to apathy by the sense of fatality, flung himself on the bed which had been John Seneschal's, certain that he would sleep through this, his last night at Thornbarrow.

He was right; sleep he did. At first he was lost in profound unconsciousness; then he became a prey to one of those dreams which visit the broken soldier's pillow, and are not so much phantasies of the brain as the repassing in vivid color and sensation of some hour of life, poignant enough to have stamped itself on the very tissues of his being. He was back again with them all, in the hollow of the hill, outside the Turkish town, which was to be the grave of three of his comrades. The pitiless sky was already growing too bright overhead; the grit and sandstone already beginning to burn him as he squatted in the insufficient shade of a clump of brushwood. Beside him sat the Buffer, his battered sun-helmet pushed back to the edge of his forehead, his hands knotted round his knees. A few yards away, in the shelter of a rock propped up and covered with coats and knapsacks, lay John Seneschal, uneasily slumbering after the Buffer's opium pill. The sound of his interrupted and difficult breathing came to them as they whispered together; and often they stopped to listen to it, going on again without comment.

Somewhere behind a screen of rock Rumty was making coffee for their breakfast. His soft curses—the spiritine was reluctant to kindle—reached them now and again;

and each time the Buffer had his good smile and his jerk of the head to mark the joke. It was not his way to let slip the smallest occasion for cheeriness. The Old Codger and Clarence—Clarence who now went in John Tempest's dream, wrapped in a black cloud of treachery—had gone to reconnoiter the town, wriggling on their stomachs over those crests which brought them against the sky line.

Black Jack—after all the torment of mistakes that was his real name, of course!—was feeling very downhearted. He did not like this plan of the Buffer's. He felt so dark a menace hanging over their three comrades, that the immediate anxiety about Brown John seemed to pale in comparison; yet the serious character of John Seneschal's sickness had only just been made manifest.

The Buffer was looking at him now. There was something very wonderful in the gaze of those steady blue eyes; it had kept the little band together, and in heart, many a time, better than could a hundred admonitions. There was such wisdom in it and knowledge and kindliness! It seemed at once to pity their youth, yet call upon their manhood. Rather than bring a glint of contempt into it, any one of the boys would have preferred the worst death.

Those eyes now held Black Jack firmly.

"It's got to be. We've got to risk it. It's a good, sound plan, after all."

"I don't like it," Black Jack was repeating. Past and present consciousness became confused in his dream. How right he had been not to like it! "Did I not say Clarence was a Judas? I knew it would be the end when we broke up. We always said we'd stick together: it's been our luck. Oh, Buffer!"

"If I'm not back by nightfall, you'll have to carry on alone with the poor lad there."

John Tempest was seized with despair. He began to protest, to implore passionately:

"Don't you see what awful things are going to happen? Don't you see it's death for you all and worse than death for me? It's going to be damnation; it's going to be Hell."

The Buffer still held him with his eyes and said, first gravely: "Do your best, Black Jack. Nothing else can matter." Then he smiled, adding, "Keep your hair on, old chap! Take it from me, you'll come through all right."

The sound of the familiar accents, worn and husky with fatigue and drought but kind and strong still, were ringing in his ears when he awoke. That little bit of every-day slang had brought an absurd sense of relief into his soul. It was as if balm had been spread on all his wounds. He had got back into their comradeship. The Buffer had forgiven him. He could feel their presence about him. Oh, desperate, cruel, nerve-racking days, when his heart had been so warm and gay in the friendship of this gallant company! . . .

"Brown John, old man," he whispered into the darkness. "Are you there? Do you hear me? I am going to do my best; I'll try and make good. Before I give up all that is yours and go out of Thornbarrow, I'd like to feel that you have forgiven me, too!"

And then it came to him that John Seneschal had forgiven him from the beginning.

CHAPTER XXI

JUST JOHN

DOCTOR CALDWELL read the letter of his country colleague with a contemptuous snort, and tossed it aside. He had had his usual arduous day, his usual excellent dinner; he was preparing to smoke his usual excellent cigar. He laughed a little over the fatuity of the rustic medico who wrote of the son of a local squire as if he were heir to the Crown. It was likely that he, Ernest Caldwell, F.R.C.S., who had already come to pick and choose his patients; who, even then, was scarce able to cope with the demands of a growing reputation, should, in the thick of the season, be able to throw away a day! And this to feast his eyes on the sight of Dr. Weatherby's cure; the ostensible reason being the burying of an old gentleman whom he had only once beheld. It was really rather too Arcadian!

This was his hour of rest. He lit his cigar, pushed away the pile of letters which still awaited attention, flung himself into his armchair and picked up the last copy of the weekly illustrated paper which had been laid to his hand. As the operator *à la mode*, he took an interest, at once cynical and professional, in that section of the press which exposed the follies and foibles of his *clientèle*.

He opened the paper haphazard. Margaret Amber's face looked out at him from the full page!

Dr. Caldwell sat staring at the frank, vivid young face. It was a recent portrait. Margaret had grown thinner

and more thoughtful looking, but the characteristics which had so much impressed themselves upon him seemed even more striking than at their first meeting. The steadiness of the eyes with their hint of defiance; the full womanly mouth with its promise of tenderness, its lines of courage and strength; the broad, low forehead, noble, serene. A girl in ten thousand!

He looked down at the letter press.

"Honorable Margaret Amber, only child of Lord Amber —engaged to Captain Seneschal. . . ."

On the opposite page, the names jumped again out of several paragraphs. *"Romance of the War—Captain Seneschal's record.—Will Baronet's death postpone wedding?*

"It will be a great disappointment to the numberless relations, friends and acquaintances of bride and bridegroom, should the charming wedding festivities planned for the Seneschal-Amber marriage have to be replaced by a private ceremony. Lady Amber, interviewed on the subject, is of opinion that a couple of months' postponement would meet our happily larger-minded ideas of mourning," etc., etc.

Dr. Caldwell jumped up with the lithe abruptness peculiar to him. He crossed the room, flung the paper into a drawer, then went to the telephone and rang up his secretary: "Kindly come an hour earlier to-morrow, Miss McIntosh. I have an urgent summons to the country. I shall have to cancel all my engagements for the day."

As the special train drew near to its destination, from the high ground along which the railway ran, Dr. Caldwell could see a great stretch of valley land, very

smiling and prosperous, crossed by the white ribbons of its roads. Along these roads black figures in groups were steadily moving, all converging in the same direction.

"Good Lord!" he cried to himself, as the fact flashed upon him, "the whole countryside is going to this funeral!"

Lord of the manor and all that, he supposed. He had a sneer for the pernicious aristocratic superstition which could place half a county under one man's domination. A superstition which was—a good thing, too!—being wiped off by the new, alert England.

John Tempest had studied the records and traditions of Thornbarrow to some purpose; and he had indeed seen to it that the obsequies of Sir Edward Seneschal should be conducted with all the state, all the consecrated dignities, which had attended those of his forefathers.

There was a sort of grand simplicity about the whole pageant which, coupled with the antique nobility of Thornbarrow itself—eloquent and exquisite witness to the power of the past!—affected the surgeon in an unexpected manner. He grew excited, stimulated, as if he had discovered some lost treasure of art. "I am glad I came," he said to himself again and again.

Presently this æsthetic emotion was replaced by one far more personal, far more vital. He had caught sight of Margaret Amber. She was looking extraordinarily erect and slim in narrow black garments. The first glance at her face showed him the hard flush on her cheek bones, the odd pallor about the lips—lips compressed, too, out of their usual soft curves into lines of desperate endurance.

"Why, the girl's in pain! She's ill," he professionally diagnosed. The next instant he cried in himself with

unwitting triumph: "No, it's mental. Something has gone deuced wrong."

Further opportunity revealed to his keen scrutiny that her eyes, fixed in an unseeing stare before her, never once sought the face of her lover; that the young man himself had a stricken look, not at all likely to be evoked (the observer cynically decided) by the loss of an old, rich father.

As the ceremony proceeded the situation became more and more marked. Miss Amber did not join the family party. There could be no mistake about it; it was a quarrel, if not a breach!

Dr. Caldwell had not been prepared to bestow much attention on the patient whom another doctor boasted to have cured. John's only interest for the specialist had lain in his morbid condition; as a healthy individual he had no sort of claim upon the worker's mind, except in so far as he had—women were such strange, perverse animals!—contrived to secure the ardent devotion of the only girl for whom Dr. Caldwell had ever felt unmitigated admiration. Now, however, he concentrated himself upon the young Seneschal as if he were a patient under his knife.

"And so Weatherby thinks he's cured him, does he? If ever I saw settled melancholy on a human countenance —what is it old Shakespeare says? 'There is no speculation in that eye.' I have seen fellows look like that when they knew themselves done with life. Oh, it's a breach, all right. There's a man with nothing left to hope for."

The doctor shifted his scalpel gaze to Margaret. Could she be hard, unforgiving? She might. She was all ideals; he had seen that. Poor, handsome creature, existence is hard for that kind of woman, the kind that

will not learn how to take the pleasure of the moment and waste their days in the chase of Blue Roses.

His imagination worked. "The usual story," he trivially supposed, "some discovery! The fellow has been away eight years, and she expected a Sir Galahad fidelity! The old silly attitude, of course!" Dr. Caldwell had thought better of her; thought her more broad-minded, she who had seen life from the revealing standpoint of the Great War. But that sort of thing was ingrained in some women, and there is no fighting against instinct. Singularly enough, this aspect of Margaret Amber immensely enhanced her quality in the eyes of the materialist who admired her.

Meanwhile the solemn function went on through all its different stages, simple and stately.

The coffin, made by Thornbarrow hands from oak grown in Thornbarrow woods, was carried by the chief tenants in turn to the little churchyard towards which sixteen generations of Seneschals had already traveled on the shoulders of others. Children, with their school-teachers, boy scouts with their masters, bands from the different villages; the clubs, all the various associations fostered by a genial landlordism; meek and militant clergy from their snug enbowered parsonages for miles around; the tradespeople from the county town where shops were shut as a mark of respect; the old, old people from the almshouses and a few strapping young soldiers from the nearest camps—these formed the slow, seemingly endless procession which wound its way along the main avenue to the little gray, square-towered church.

Those of the funeral guests—neighbors, relatives and friends who, like Dr. Caldwell, had come by train and felt able for the exertion, followed with the humbler folk

on foot. Many others proceeded direct to the church where Lady Seneschal and Gabrielle, crêpe-veiled to the feet, presently took up their post in the family pew.

The new bearer of the Seneschal honors walked alone; a spare, erect figure, noticeable in his khaki amid the universal black. Dr. Caldwell had chosen to walk, too. He wanted to be "in" with it all; and he contrived to place himself just behind Margaret Amber and the small gray man whom he divined to be her father.

A red-faced, high-colored individual, who even in his suit of black managed to look loud, suddenly arrested his attention. A rather unfavorable specimen of the genus "bounder," thus he would have summed up and dismissed the young fellow from his thought without another glance on an ordinary occasion. But surely that glower of hatred and menace with which he was regarding the heir; that gaze, truculent, sullen, malignant of an ill-conditioned dog ready to fly at your throat; that meant something! Caldwell's suspicions were confirmed when he saw the unknown, attempting to enter into conversation with Lord Amber, met by the cut direct.

"Can you tell me who is that young man?" he had the curiosity to ask of his neighbor in the church; a sturdy, weather-beaten country gentleman.

This latter shook his head, but passed on the question behind his hand to the family solicitor who happened to be in front of him. The answer came back:

"Young Seneschal-Smith. A cousin. He'd have come in for it all if Captain Seneschal had gone the way of the other boys. And a jolly good thing he hasn't!" added the Squire. "I don't fancy his looks."

Dr. Caldwell's interest lapsed. A mere vulgar case of disappointed hopes!

The dim-toned bell that had rung so many infant Seneschals into the lap of the church; so many happy or pensive Seneschal brides into the arms of their bridegrooms; so many Seneschals, old or young, to their ultimate resting place; the bell that had tolled for the two Seneschal boys, that had pealed a restless, beating pæan on Armistice Night, was now dropping its knell, like slow tears.

There were only three, in that great concourse, to know that when the gaping grave outside received its guest, the long line of the Seneschals would have come to an end. Nevertheless all agreed afterwards that there had been a sense of fatality in the air under the arch of the blue sky, with the radiance of the flowering earth, the May green all about them; that, notwithstanding the youthful promise of the keen-faced, dark, young soldier, the brilliant and happy prospects, before him, there had hung, like a tangible blackness, some presentiment of evil and doom.

As the coffin was lowered into the grave, a painful incident occurred.

Leaning on the arms of a scared man-servant and a distraught-looking hospital nurse, the dowager Lady Seneschal, her bleached blue eyes blazing out of the fine-lined ivory of her face, came, tottering but determined, up the churchyard path, the crowd parting before her as with a sort of fear.

The widow, standing by the grave between John Tempest and Gabrielle, was heard, through Mr. Dominick's portentous entoning, to shriek faintly. Dr. Weatherby stepped forward and tried to arrest the old woman, but she put him on one side with a magnificent gesture of her black-gloved hand.

From the recesses of her cupboards she had apparently

unearthed the weeds in which she had mourned for the husband lost forty years before. They swept about her, rusty, voluminous, immensely funereal. Disengaging herself from her supporters, she reached her daughter-in-law's side, then looked round. There was, for the moment, no senile wandering in that eagle glance; rather an austere self-control, a blighting scorn.

"It is my son who is dead. Shall his mother be left out of the funeral?"

The words, in the far-away, old voice, with its curiously deep yet high-bred intonation, rang into an awful moment of silence. Mr. Dominick had allowed himself to be betrayed into a break of the solemn service. One of the assistant clergymen jogged his elbow and prompted; and the clerical voice was again musically uplifted.

The dowager, as if satisfied with the effect she had produced, took her place beside the widow, drawing over her countenance the great veil of obliterating crêpe which had been flung back across her bonnet. Ever and anon her *cavernous* "Amen!" came to punctuate the solemn periods.

Although some of the neighboring gentry, many villagers and other country folk, dispersed back to their homes as soon as the funeral was over, the chief farmers and employees, and some of the representative county notabilities as well as close relatives, returned to Thornbarrow upon Sir John Seneschal's special invitation.

They straggled across the Park in irregular black groups, making strange blots on the radiant silver-green pallor of the downs.

In the opinion of his new vassals Sir John was "doing things proper, just about." They were hastening with pleasurable anticipation to a repast which they felt sure

would be worthy of the rest of the ceremony. Their late lord had never been specially popular. He lacked the geniality which would have gone a great deal further towards winning their hearts than the recognized strict rectitude of his rule. He had been "a rare one at roofs and gates"; and as for pig-styes, none could have cast a word against him, but "there, he done the same for his cattle, and the like of we's might have been stock, for all the human nature in his eye."

Nevertheless, while dispassionately criticizing, these Dorset folk felt themselves one with the owners of Thornbarrow, as they felt themselves one with the soil on which it stood. Seneschals were their own, they were Seneschal men. Now their thoughts and looks, their kindly, curious, busy feelings, turned to the young soldier who was to become their figure-head, with an almost sentimental warmth of proprietorship. They were going to be immensely proud of him. "Though sure it be a pity, it be that, that he should be so dark!" A black Seneschal! Such a thing had never been heard of, not in the tales of the oldest among them. "My missis, she did say to my lady, when she first laid eyes on the baby, 'There, my lady,' she says, ''tis a black lamb you be bringing in among the flock!' she says, 'a regular little black lamb!'"

His un-Seneschal coloring of the new master added, however, zest to the interest he inspired as it certainly added to the romance of his aspect. Every inch the soldier hero he looked, they opined. In their slow, ruminative, bucolic way, they rejoiced over his unmistakable breeding. ("Seneschals ud take a lot of beating.") And Farmer Goldring expressed the feeling of the majority when he declared that, in his opinion, "that there lad mid yet be the finest of them all."

Lord Amber had quietly drawn Margaret back within the shelter of the porch to avoid inconvenient encounters with friends and neighbors. She was grateful for his watchful thought of her, but she was just then past caring for anything the world could do to her.

"And now," she said, rising from the old oaken bench, when the last whirr of motor, the last rattle of wheels and clap of hoofs had fallen into silence, "I'll go home. Thank you, father; it is well over."

He laid a restraining hand on her arm.

"No, my dear, I want you to come up to Thornbarrow with me."

"Father——!"

"Margaret, I received a note last night, from John, begging of me, as a favor, to bring you. Circumstances can sometimes make a request more compelling than a command. This is one of them."

She stood, staring at him, the pupils of her eyes dilating and contracting under the pulse of fierce emotion. Questions, avowals, were rushing to her lips. But she set them close. Never, never, even to him! What he knew, what he guessed, let it lie between them, untouched.

"I will go with you," she said abruptly, after a pause.

Her heart leaped; she could have torn it out of her breast. For the hour of peace and forgiveness had not lasted with her. With the return of suffering had come again a hundred burning angers; and, that day, everything had added intolerably to them. "To see him act the chief mourner; to see him play his monstrous part and dishonor his uniform! Oh, was nothing sacred to him? Was there no place in the whole man where honor could sting him? Yet, how was it better with her, that

her heart should leap at the thought of seeing him once again?

A long table had been spread in the great, seldom-used dining-hall, round which Margaret and her father found a diversified gathering already seated. The farmers and estate officials had congregated instinctively at the lower end of the board—as it were, below the salt—while the relations and neighbors surrounded John at the head of the table.

On either side of him sat the two ladies Seneschal. This was a departure from custom which had surprised the company; but as for the dowager, nodding to sleep in her chair, most could see for themselves how all efforts to induce her to withdraw had proved unavailing. The widow remained (it was whispered diversely) because she could not trust her son's behavior in public, or because he had, himself, insisted on her presence. He certainly had shown a strange anxiety to gather the mourners about him, and he remained standing, when all were seated, as one who is about to make a speech. Yet he remained silent. His eyes were roaming from side to side, with a terrible anxiety—searching.

Dr. Caldwell, sitting beside Weatherby, was conscious of an acceleration of the pulse, so complicatedly interesting did he find the situation. "Who is he waiting for?" he had asked himself; and as quickly answered in triumphant discovery, "Miss Amber; he expected her and she is not here!" It was, as he had guessed from the beginning, the breach absolute.

Hardly had the conviction formed itself when a light—singular compound of agony and relief—flashed into the seeking eyes. Lord Amber and Margaret had come into the room. Midway down the length of the table, Lord

Amber arrested his daughter by a touch on the arm, apparently to take advantage of a couple of empty chairs. He made a courteous gesture towards his host, and sat down next to her. Nothing could have looked more natural for mere friends. But in the circumstances —"Why the dickens have come at all?" Caldwell wondered.

The girl took her place with dropped eyes and set, flushed face. And the lover stood rigid, white as death. Caldwell looked from one to the other; then he became aware that Weatherby was whispering to him in husky tones of discomfiture:

"They ought to make him sit down. What is Mr. Dominick about? What's his fool of a mother thinking of? The boy has already had more than he can bear; he's overstrained. They've left everything on his shoulders. What confounded nonsense is he up to; what does he want to be speechifying for? Look here, if you'll shove your chair out a bit, Dr. Caldwell, I'll slip away and get round to him myself."

The other put out his hand and pressed his colleague back into his chair. John had squared his shoulders, dropped his hands by his side and lifted his head. He flung a long look down the table, from face to face, passing over Margaret's with momentarily dropped eyelids; then he drew a long breath through his nostrils.

"Before you break bread here to-day," he said in a voice none had ever heard from him before—the voice in which a leader may call his men together at the desperate pass—"under the impression that I am your host, that I am Sir John Seneschal, the owner of Thornbarrow, I want you all to know the truth——"

There was a general gasp of astonishment, more expres-

sive than any outcry. Dr. Caldwell quickly glanced at Margaret. She had started from her stony composure, and, lips parted and quivering, eyes kindled with extraordinary fires, was now fixing the speaker.

"I have no right to be here," John went on.

Lady Seneschal lifted a shrill cry:

"He's mad! Where's Weatherby? Where's Weatherby, I say? He's gone mad again!"

Instantly there was confusion and clamor.

"Dear me, dear, dear me, this is truly distressing!" Mr. Dominick could be heard intoning. "Captain Seneschal, Sir John, let me entreat you to control yourself—for your poor mother's sake!"

"There is that strange young man again! Who is he?" the dowager, startled from sleep, was vainly demanding.

With a roar Teddy Seneschal-Smith had sprung to his feet.

"So the game's up! Who was right? By gum, who is in the right of it now? Oh, you, Lord Amber, what did I tell you?"

"He's mad; he's wrong in his head; will nobody stop him?" But Lady Seneschal's protests were now feeble. Overwhelming her was a sense of mortal conviction, of hopeless defeat.

Rough ejaculations began to rise from below the salt. John stood like a man under fire. A moment he turned to the moaning widow, and from her to the expostulating Weatherby, with a savage contempt:

"Ah, no, you can't stifle me with this any more! I must speak now. Nothing in the world can stop me now."

Lady Seneschal looked up at him, fury darting from under her swollen eyelids; then she cowered and hid her face in both her hands. She knew that she was beaten.

John Tempest's nerves were at snapping point. Something must be done to stop the booming of the dowager's voice, with its reiterate imbecile question. He bent towards her:

"If you will keep silence for a moment, Madam, you will hear what you want to know."

Though his tone was measured to perfect courtesy, his glance had that in it which cowed her as it cowed her daughter-in-law. She shrank into herself, muttering; her head shook as it dropped on her breast. The very old are as quickly frightened as children.

John felt himself tapped on the shoulder and, wheeling round, found Lord Amber by his side. The elder man was looking at him with that gaze of kindliness which had once been so welcome, but which now, knowing of him what he did, filled John's soul with horror. The worst of all his tormentors had been the man who had tempted him! He shook off the touch, and once more faced the table.

He began to speak, but had to stop. How could he hope to make himself heard over this buzz of excited talk? As he paused, confused, exasperated, desperate, a voice rose sedately authoritative at his shoulder. It was Lord Amber's. In an instant he had collected the attention of the room with the ease of the practiced speaker.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "my friend here has told us that he has something to say to us—the least we can do is to listen."

John did not waste time to wonder what might be meant by this unexpected support. It made silence for him; that was enough. Into this silence he must discharge his burden and have done with it all.

"I shall not keep you long," he said, and then began to hurl his words, loudly, sharply, like so many bullets.

"The whole business was wrong from the beginning. A horrid mix-up, an awful blunder. It's a case of mistaken identity. My memory went——" he made a fierce gesture to his scarred forehead. "I was picked up in a rotten Turkish prison hospital, and they found on me things belonging to another man—to John Seneschal. John Seneschal, who is dead!"

In spite of the breathless absorption with which his listeners now hung upon his speech, groans broke out here—and muttered exclamations: "Dead. Dead, the last of them, dead! God Almighty!"

"He died in my arms; I buried him. He gave me his things to bring his people. He made me put on his togs, too. We were escaped prisoners. I'd got a Turkish rig-out. Would have been shot for a spy, sure as fate, if I were nabbed. We were chums. He was always talking of Thornbarrow and——" He flung a gaze in Margaret's direction, just stopping short of reaching her. His voice altered subtly—"of Thornbarrow and those he cared for. And so, in my ravings—like the lunatic I was, it was Thornbarrow, Thornbarrow all the time with me—Thornbarrow and the rest of it——"

He broke off. There was dead silence. Gripping the back of his chair with both hands, he leaned forward, tense:

"Blank as my mind was, I knew one thing! I knew I was not young Seneschal. I told them so—they'll bear me witness—told them, and told them, and told them—that John Seneschal was dead, till—" his eyes suddenly caught Caldwell's cold, hostile stare, and anger blazed from him—"till I was threatened with the madhouse! I couldn't tell them who the dickens I was; and they, oh, they were cocksure! And Sir Edward was dying upstairs.

He thought his last son had come back to him! They got me to promise never to speak to him of my—my delusion! The day before he died, my memory came back. I knew myself. His death releases me. I am free to speak. I am John Tempest."

Again there was a heavy pause.

"I have been reported dead. I am told that my nearest kin won't believe that I am alive. My own memory is my only proof. It is enough for me. I have never had any business to be here. And before the hour is out, I shall have gone from this place—forever! It has been a cursed muddle from beginning to end! It will have brought great trouble and disappointment. I can only ask pardon from my soul of those who have been wounded however involuntarily by me. I ought to have stood firmer." He stopped very abruptly; touched his forehead, as if he had been wearing his military cap, and began to march out of the room.

The restrained emotion of the company now broke out. The mind of the Dorset countryman is not swift to work. The uneducated portion of John's audience had grasped little of his speech beyond the fact that here was a young nobody forced to confess that he had been passing himself off as one of the great Seneschals. Mr. Seneschal-Smith's strident jeer, "You know the game's up!" had rung much more convincingly in their ears than the unlikely, to them inexplicable, tale of lost memory and family pressure.

The gentry portion of the company were of various minds. One or two bereaved fathers thought the haggard young soldier more deserving of sympathy than of condemnation; but it is part of the English character to resent being made witness of a scene, and there was a

strong feeling that Lady Seneschal should have been spared the brutal ordeal of a public disclosure.

Gabrielle's cries: "He's murdered mother! It's too cruel, it's too dreadful! He's murdered mother!" were met by murmurs of sympathy.

Quite off his head with sordid elation, the egregious Teddy considered it time to bring himself forward as the person who was, after all, the most important present:

"I say, you know, this is a pretty show-up, isn't it?" He flung a pointing finger at the erect figure in khaki now passing out of door. "I'd have that fellow taken up, like a shot I would, only it would be a damned sight too unpleasant for my poor cousins. Regular swindler! Regular Tichborne case, what?"

He was answered by groans; some execration and a great deal of clacking of tongues.

"A proper young scoundrel, that he be!" Farmer Goldring shouted.

"I was on his tracks," resumed the new baronet, much stimulated. "He knew the game was up. I warned Lord Amber here, weeks ago. Didn't I, Amber? A lying, skulking fraud——!"

He was brought to a sudden stop. Margaret Amber was standing before him, as if poised on wings of anger. For one quivering second she held him under the flame of her glance, then she struck him across the face with the long black glove she held in her hand.

"It is you who are the liar!"

As he staggered, sputtering in amazed discomfiture, she wheeled on the gathering:

"Fools that you all are," she fulminated. Then, in a rush, she was gone.

"By the lord, the girl's divine!" thought Caldwell. He

drew a hissing breath, "and that fellow will come out top dog after all."

Dr. Caldwell was not so prejudiced as not to have felt the complete honesty of John Tempest's speech. Nevertheless he was ungenerous enough to curse him in his heart for the good fortune he envied so bitterly.

John Tempest picked up his cap in the hall and went straight out of the house. He had some money in his pocket, enough to take him up to London and keep him there for perhaps a week. To London, of course, he must go. To report himself to the War Office was the first step back to his regiment. It was quite possible that they would not believe him up there; that Lord Amber had been right and that his uncle would also repudiate him. Well, he was in no frame of mind to care. He had only one thought: he must get away from Thornbarrow; Thornbarrow, where joy and agony had torn him between them. He must try and forget, obliterate. . . .

It was a five-mile walk to the station. Instinctively he turned away from the metaled road to take the short cut across the Downs. At first he went very quickly, but fell to a slower pace as the curious, wild, haunted peace began to lay its spell upon him.

This man upon whom the sun now shone and the breeze beat; with the scent of a thousand herbs and blossoms in his nostrils, the cry of the rooks, the distant plaint of the sheep in his ears; and about him an all-encompassing sense of solitude, at first tasted all these sensations physically, with no more intellectual consciousness than an animal. His soul, which had so suffered and striven, was as dead within him. His faculties were in abeyance.

But, presently, thoughts reared themselves in the blank

of his mind; he was done with it all—done with them all! These crowded months, with their insistent throng—tormentors, every one, save her who had been his sanity, his strength, his angel, who was now his scourge!—all had vanished, rolled away! Dr. Caldwell, cynic and tyrant; Lady Seneschal and Gabrielle, gadflies; piteous Sir Edward; well-meaning Weatherby, rough and ignorant; Lord Amber, who had played Satan to him at the critical hour—they had risen on his sick brain like a night delirium, they had passed with the break of the cold day. "Come like shadows, so depart!"

He was as a creature reborn to an alien world; as a man, dropped from the skies—there never was any one so alone as he must be now! These waste moors were but a faint image of the desert emptiness of his own life.

A light thud of running feet behind him, a voice crying his name: "John—stop! John!" reached his dazed senses like sounds in a dream.

"I am mad!" he said to himself, and, as if to fly the distressing illusion, again hastened his pace. But the cry pursued him. He stopped to listen, though—since this, he knew, was madness—he would not turn to behold the waste as empty as his life.

Running feet, panting breath; close, so close now! He wheeled at last.

"John——!"

No, he had not lost his senses. Margaret! It was Margaret!

Within a pace of him she halted and flung out her arms.

"Wherever you go—I go!—John Seneschal or John Tempest, I cannot divide you, I cannot tear you from my *heart.* All the love of all these years, I gave it to you,

not knowing. I cannot take it back. When I thought I loved him, I was loving you. And now, looking back, it seems still you, always! I cannot divide you; you are one in my thought: Just John——"

Her voice broke. The next moment her arms were about him; her tender kisses were upon his face.

"Oh, my poor tortured boy! Oh, honest lips, how I honor you! Oh, dear scarred forehead, beloved eyes—so sad, so strained and hopeless!—My own John, I forgive you—forgive me!"

Lord Amber was standing close to them. His chin on his breast, he was looking at them from under shaggy eyebrows. There was a lurking tenderness behind the searching of his gaze, but his mouth was set into lines of extreme gravity.

"Well, John Tempest?—Well, Margaret?" The set mouth relaxed suddenly, the eyes twinkled. "You are a prompt champion, my girl!"

"Ah, father," cried she, "I don't care what you say! It has got to be John, after all." Then the chord of pain in her tones merged into triumph as she eyed him. "You knew this would be the end of it? You can't deny it; you brought me here for this."

John was silent; in his mind Lord Amber still represented one of the enemy. Swiftly glancing from him to her father, Margaret wondered.

"What is it? What is there between you? Father, I must know! John, why are you angry with father?"

"I went to him that morning——"

She interrupted him, intuition flashing:

"The morning you rode out? The morning I found the pocketbook?"

"Ah, was that how you knew?" cried John hoarsely.

Her face quivered. How steeped in sorrow was all the whole strange love-story! She was agonized; yet she was sealed in passion for this John—who was not John Seneschal and was yet so irrevocably now her John! But she wanted to understand.

"You went to father——"

"Yes—to tell him."

"Oh, father, I knew you knew! I knew it and I could not think how! John, it was fine of you. I love you for that."

"My poor little girl!" said Lord Amber. "I was very cruel to him."

"You——?"

Then John spoke, between his teeth:

"He offered me to hush it up. He wanted me to keep silence. He——"

"I tested him," said the father, sharply. And then, in gentler accents he went on: "I had to; it was the only way. I am glad I did it. Forgive me, John Tempest, I am glad I did it. I tested you—and you rang true metal."

He held out his hand. After a moment's hesitation, the young man put his into it. Margaret looked up at his spent face:

"Look here, father," she said quickly, "go back and get the car, there is a darling, and pick us up at the East Lodge. John and I will walk on. John, you are coming home with us and father will settle everything—everything!"

Lord Amber gave his curious little inner chuckle. There was a slight misting of his eyes. He moved away, without a word. How sure she was of him, his head-

strong, passionate girl! Well, she was right to be so. He would not fail her.

Margaret put her hand on John's arm and led him with a soft pressure, as she had so often led him in his mental blindness, towards the King's Barrow.

She sat on the mound, and let him lie outstretched—broken, yet so unbelievably blessed, hiding his aching head on her lap—let him cry his heart out like a child.

Her fingers caressed his hair now and again, but she did not speak. No silence could be deep enough for such a moment. She knew that she loved him utterly; the more that everything—whether the things of the world, or the things of the soul—must now come to him through her. She knew, too, that there would always be a great sadness woven in the great bond of their love.

. . . . . .

The price Lord Amber gave Sir Edward Seneschal-Smith for Thornbarrow is not a matter he cares to talk about. Any one who knows the new Baronet's disposition is quite certain that he made full use of his opportunity; that he extracted "a topping sum" from the millionaire for his parental folly.

But Lord Amber (though no business man ever likes to be got the better of) does not regret his extravagance. The two who now dwell at Thornbarrow and are taking up life together with such a grave appreciation of their own blessings, such a solemn sense of obligation to the memory of the dead, have already repaid him a thousand times.

He looks forward to the day when a little John Sene-

schal Tempest will heal the last lingering sense of pain which yet broods about the ancient place, and with childish laughter and scamper of small feet, scare away forever the ghosts of old sorrow.

THE END